



b. No 5439A.74

V. 2



GIVEN BY

Mrs J. S. Williams





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2014

<https://archive.org/details/institutesofnatu02prie>

John Williams.



I N S T I T U T E S  
O F  
N A T U R A L a n d R E V E A L E D  
R E L I G I O N.

V O L. II.

C O N T A I N I N G

The Evidences of the Jewish and Christian  
Revelations.

---

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

---

*Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh  
you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and  
fear.*

P E T E R.

---

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. JOHNSON, No. 72, in St. Paul's  
Church-Yard. M D C C L X X I I I.

293

5439a.74

4.5

Mrs. J. B. W. Williams

337.783

Nov. 13, 1883

# THE PREFACE.

IN the first part of this volume I have made great use of a treatise of Dr. Leland's, intitled, *The advantage and necessity of the Christian Revelation, shewed from the state of religion in the antient Heathen world*; and as all the articles I have mentioned are much more largely discussed in that excellent work, where the proper authorities are alledged, I thought it unnecessary to make any particular reference to authors here. If any thing in the account that I have given of antient or modern unbelievers be controverted, it is that work, and not mine, which must be examined for the purpose.

Upon the subject of *prophecy*, I have also made much use of Bishop Newton's very valuable discourses; and I think it better to make this general acknowledgement, than to refer to these writers page by page in the course of my work.

My readers must not forget that I am writing for the use of *young persons*, and therefore that I am glad to avail myself of any thing that I can meet with which I think proper for their use. I do not recollect, however, that I have, in any other part of this volume, made so much use of any particular writer, as to think it worth while to make any acknowledgement for it ; except, perhaps, my borrowing from *Dr. Doddridge's Lectures*, some arguments against the pretended miracles of *Apollonius Tyanæus*.

Let it be observed, also, that, writing, as I do, for the instruction of *youth*, though I have not knowingly concealed any *objection*, which, in my own opinion has the appearance of much weight, I have not thought proper to trouble them with the discussion of every subtle cavil, which has at any time been advanced against revelation in general, or christianity in particular ; because I consider some of them as the effect of such manifest perverseness, as would create difficulties in the clearest cause in the world. I have mentioned so many arguments in favour of revelation, and have replied to so many of the objections to it, that, considering the general plan of my work, I judged

judged it to be altogether superfluous to advance any thing more, whether there be any weight, or no weight at all, in what I have written.

Trite as the subject of this volume is, it is far from being exhausted; but, like every other subject of very great importance, it is hardly possible for any person to give much attention to it, without finding either some new arguments for it, or, at least, setting the old ones in some new and more striking point of light. Some merit of this kind will, perhaps, be allowed to me, especially as far as it respects a commodious *general distribution* of my materials; which I flatter myself will be thought to be easier, and more natural, than that of others who have written upon the same subject, and to be calculated to exhibit the evidences of revelation with peculiar strength and clearness.

Fully satisfied as I myself am of the truth of christianity, and of the sufficiency of the proofs which I have, in this treatise, advanced in favour of it, I am by no means sanguine in my expectations from what I have done, any farther than that it may be of use in the instruction of the *young*, the *ignorant*, or the *unsettled*, which was my pri-

mary object. No person who knows much of the world can expect that *confirmed believers* will so much as look into it, much less that they will give it a deliberate and impartial perusal. They will presume that they have already thought enough upon the subject, and will not chuse to disturb their minds with any farther discussion of a question which they have long ago decided, or change that course of life into which they were led, and to which they have been accustomed in consequence of it.

I mention this circumstance with no other view than to admonish young persons of the very great care they ought to take in forming their judgements upon a subject of so much importance as this ; since in the course of a few years, the effect of the impressions to which their minds must necessarily be subject, will be either a firm and joyful persuasion of the truth of christianity, a great indifference to it and neglect of it, or an obstinate and gloomy unbelief. The first of these states of mind I cannot help considering as, in the highest degree, favourable to virtue and happiness, and the last to be, in as great a degree, unfriendly to both. I use the word *gloomy* in speaking of the state of an unbeliever's mind, because

because I consider my own most cheerful prospects as derived from that faith which he disclaims ; and unless I be wholly mistaken with respect to the object of true christian faith, every defender of it must necessarily have the prejudices of the vicious and profligate against him, and the good will of all the friends of virtue.

If the bible contain a true history, we can no longer entertain the least doubt, or be under any uncertainty, concerning the existence, or the moral government of God. We are sure that a being of infinite power and wisdom is the author of every thing that we behold, that he constantly inspects, and attends to the interest of all his creatures, nothing that he has made being at any time neglected or overlooked by him ; and, more especially, that he is influenced by a most intense affection for all his rational offspring ; that he is *good and ready to forgive*, and to receive into favour all who sincerely repent of the sins they have committed, and endeavour to conform to his will for the future. If christianity be true, we can entertain no doubt with respect to a future life, but are absolutely certain that, though we must all die, we shall *all be made alive again*, that Christ

will come, by the appointment of God his father, to judge the quick and the dead, and to give to every man according to his works.

Now the firm belief of these important truths (concerning which there are great doubts and difficulties on the light of nature, but none at all upon the supposition of the truth of christianity) cannot fail to elevate the sentiments, and enoble the nature of man. It will effectually support us under all the trials of life, and give us hope and joy in the hour of death. On the other hand, a state of doubt and uncertainty with respect to these articles of faith must make every well disposed mind (which cannot but most earnestly wish them to be true) anxious and unhappy; and a total disbelief of them must tend to debase the soul, and prepare a man for giving into every kind of vice and excess to which he is strongly tempted. When his views and prospects are narrow and confined, his pursuits will be so too. To adopt a coarse, but just observation, which has been made with respect to this subject, if a man expects to *die* like a dog, it cannot but be supposed that he will also *live* like one.

If,

If, contrary to my expectations, any unbeliever should have the curiosity to look into the following treatise, I would premise to him, that he is to consider it as containing nothing more than my own particular view of the evidences of christianity; that if he perceives any thing weak or unguarded in what I have advanced, it behoves himself, as well as me, to consider whether the cause in general will not admit of a better defence, that he must look into other defences of christianity for the supply of any deficiencies which he may find in this; and not think himself justified in his unbelief, till, after an examination of *his own*, an examination truly impartial, and earnest, becoming the importance of the subject, he is satisfied, that not *what has passed for christianity*, but, *what is really so*, is altogether indefensible, having had its source in enthusiasm, or imposture, or both.

Besides the books which I have already mentioned in this preface, or which I have occasionally quoted in the body of the work, I would recommend to those persons who would wish to have more satisfaction with respect to several branches of the evidences of christianity, the following treatises, several of which are not large or expensive, among

among many others which may have great merit of the same kind, though I happen not to be so well acquainted with them. *Farmer on miracles*, 8vo. *Price's dissertations*, 8vo. *West on the resurrection of Christ*. 8vo. *Lyttleton on the conversion of St. Paul*. 8vo. *The Criterion*. 8vo. *Lardner's Jewish and heathen testimonies*, 4 vols. 4to. and his *History of the writers of the New Testament*, 3 vols. 8vo. which may be had separate from his larger work on the *Credibility*. *Butler's analogy*, 8vo. *Leland's view of the diestical writers*, 2 vols. 8vo. *Jortin's discourses on the truth of the christian religion*, and his *Remarks on ecclesiastical history*, 3 vols. 8vo. *Duchal's sermons*, 8vo. *Macknight on the truth of the gospel history*, 4to. *Doddridge's three sermons on the evidences of christianity*, especially the second, 12mo. *Sharp's arguments for the truth of the christian religion*. 2 vols. 8vo. *Lowman on the Ritual*, and also on the *Civil Government of the Hebrews*, 2 vols. 8vo. and especially *Hartley's view of the evidences of christianity* in the 2d vol. of his *Observations on man*.

I shall also beg leave to refer my reader to some observations which I published under the signature of CLEMENS in the *Theological Repository*, Vol. 3, p. 3, &c. intitled,

An

*An essay on the analogy there is between the methods by which the perfection and happiness of men are promoted according to the dispensations of natural and revealed religion.* These, I have there endeavoured to shew, are exceedingly similar, the immediate object in both being a gradual extension of the views, and an enlargement of the comprehension of the human mind. This, however, is not a consideration on which I do not lay so much stress as to think it proper to introduce it into these *Institutes*. It is acknowledged not to be sufficient to produce conviction in the minds of unbelievers, but it is hoped that it exhibits such a *presumptive argument* in favour of the scheme of revelation, as is calculated to give some additional satisfaction to those who are already the lovers and friends of revealed religion; though to persons who have not a philosophical turn of mind, it may seem to be too abstruse, and to have too much refinement in it.

Several of the above-mentioned writers undertake to defend articles which, in my opinion, do not belong to christianity, as will be seen in the future volumes of this work, as well as in my other writings; and they consequently make the defence of christianity

christianity more difficult than was necessary ; but, notwithstanding this, they all contain observations that are well worth the closest attention, in order both to evince the truth of revelation, and to confirm the faith of those who already believe in it.

It ought to be observed upon this subject, that *faith* is not one absolute and determinate thing, but that it admits of *degrees* ; proceeding from a simple *assent* to a preposition, which arises from a bare preponderancy of the arguments in favour of it, and advancing, by the most insensible gradation, to that *fullness of persuasion*, which arises from the preception of the greatest clearness and strength of the evidence for it. The passions and affections, if they be at all moved by a bare assent, will be extremely languid, though the thing itself be of the greatest moment ; whereas a full persuasion of the reality of an interesting object excites the most vigorous and fervent emotions. The difference of the impression they make upon the mind is properly compared to the effect of an object placed at a very great, or a very small distance. If any thing in the conduct of life depend upon belief, we shall, in the former case, be hardly influenced by it at all ; a very small motive

motive being sufficient to over power the effect of so superficial a faith ; at best we shall be irresolute and inconstant ; whereas, in the latter case, we shall be determined to vigorous and immediate action.

It is, therefore, a matter of the greatest consequence, not only that unbelievers be made converts to the christian faith, but that the faith of believers themselves be strengthened, and they be thereby converted from merely *nominal* into *real* christians, who live and act under an habitual and lively sense of the great truths of christianity ; and who, in all their enjoyments and pursuits in this world, never lose sight of their relation to another and a better.

Now faith is *increased* by the very same means by which it is first *generated*, viz. by an attention to the proper evidences, and a frequent contemplation of the object of it. Those persons, therefore, who call themselves christians, and who must be supposed to wish to feel and act as becomes christians, should study the evidences of their religion ; they should meditate upon the life, discourses, and miracles of Christ ; and make familiar to their minds every thing relating to the history and propagation of christianity in the world. They should

should both frequently read the scriptures, and also other books which tend to prove their truth, and illustrate their contents.

I shall think myself very happy, and that I gain a very valuable end, if this part of my work, though it be of no use to the conversion of unbelievers, should be a means of *confirming the faith* of any professing christians, leading them to a better understanding of the reasons of their faith, and making them think more frequently, and more highly of their privileges and obligations as christians.

T H E

# THE CONTENTS

## OF VOL. II.

### PART I.

<b>O</b> F the state of the heathen world —	page 2
Sec. I. <i>Of the origin and corruption of natural religion in general.</i>	4
Sec. II. <i>Of the corruption of theology in particular.</i>	12
See. III. <i>Of the moral sentiments of the Heathens.</i>	31
Sec. IV. <i>Of the doctrine of a future state among the Heathens.</i>	49
Part II. Observations previous to the examination of the proper evidences of revelation. —	68
Sec. I. <i>Of the nature and use of miracles.</i>	68
Sec. II. <i>Of the nature of the evidence for revelation.</i>	73
Sec. III. <i>Of the importance of testimony, and the credibility of miracles.</i>	77
Sec. IV. <i>Rules for estimating the value of human testimony.</i>	87
Sec. V. <i>Of the antecedent credibility of the Jewish and Christian revelations.</i>	91
Part III. The evidences of the Jewish and Christian religions, derived from <i>testimony</i> , and especially that of its friends. —	98
Sec. I. <i>Of the authenticity of the books of scripture.</i>	98
Sec. II. <i>Of the evidence from testimony in favour of the Christian revelation.</i>	113
Sec. IV. <i>Considerations on the resurrection of Christ, and others of a similar nature.</i>	133
Sec. V.	

Sec. V. Of the credibility of the Old Testament history. ——————	150
Part IV. The evidence of the Jewish and Christian revelations derived from present appearances. 161	
Sec. I. Arguments from the existence, propagation, and good effects of the Jewish and Christian religions. ——————	161
Sec. II. Arguments from standing Customs, &c. in favour of the Jewish and Christian religions. 178	
Sec. III. Various internal evidences of the truth of the scripture history. ——————	183
Part V. The evidence of revealed religion from Prophecy. ——————	196
Sec. I. Prophecies relating to various nations which had connections with the Jews. ——————	198
Sec. II. Prophecies relating to the Messiah. 209	
Sec. III. Prophecies in the New Testament. 223	
Part VI. An examination of the evidence of several miracles which have been said to have been wrought for other purposes than the confirmation of the Jewish and Christian revelations. 236	
Part VII. A view of the principal Objections to the Jewish and Christian revelations. 248	
Sec. I. Various objections respecting the Old Testament. ——————	251
Sec. II. Of the Objection to revelation from the supposed Inspiration of the scriptures, and others of a similar nature. ——————	271
Sec. III. Some objections which more nearly affect the proper evidence of revelation, especially respecting the ancient and present state of the belief of it. ——————	280
Sec. IV. Miscellaneous objections to the system of revelation. ——————	303
The Conclusion. ——————	313

# THE EVIDENCES O F REVEALED RELIGION.

WE have seen how far unassisted reason has been able to carry us in our inquiries concerning the being, perfections, and providence of God, and also concerning the duty and final expectations of mankind ; or rather how far unassisted reason *might* have been able to carry us in these inquiries. For though it be true that all the deductions we have made are derived from the consideration of nothing but what we *feel* or *see*, yet these conclusions were never, in fact, drawn from those premises, by any of the human race ; and it is in vain that we look for so complete a system of morals among the most intelligent of mankind. Indeed, the very imperfect state of this important kind of knowledge in the heathen world, and the growing corruption of morals, which was

the consequence of it, furnish a strong proof of the expediency, if not of the absolute necessity of divine revelation.

## P A R T I.

### OF THE STATE OF THE HEATHEN WORLD.

**I**T will be acknowledged that, of all the heathen nations, the greatest progress in useful knowledge is to be looked for among the Egyptians, and other oriental people, but more especially among the Greeks, who greatly improved upon the stock of knowledge which they borrowed from the east. It is, therefore, doing the greatest justice to this subject, to consider the state of knowledge and virtue among these nations.

The Greek philosophers had not failed to give particular attention to the subject of morals and theology; some of the most conspicuous of their sects having had no other object; and yet, though they had flourished, unmolested, for the space of near six hundred years before the time of Christ, and had frequently divided and subdivided

divided themselves (the leaders of every new sect pretending to improve upon all who had gone before them) none of them attained to any thing like a full conviction concerning the unity, the attributes, and moral government of God. They had very imperfect ideas of the just extent of moral virtue; and the knowledge they had of a future state added little or no strength to its obligations. The practice also of the Gentile world was such as might be expected from the general corruption of their moral and religious principles.

All these particulars are sufficiently known to the learned, and may be known to any person who will take a little pains to acquaint himself with the state of knowledge and virtue in the Gentile world; but as these things are not sufficiently known to the generality of christians, and the superficial thinkers among us have been greatly misled with respect to this subject, I shall select a few particular facts, which may give those who are attentive and unprejudiced a pretty just idea of what the most enlightened of our species actually were before the promulgation of christianity.

## SECTION I.

*Of the origin and corruption of natural religion in general.*

PERSONS who begin to think upon these subjects when they are arrived to years of maturity, and who find in themselves a full persuasion concerning the great truths of natural religion, concerning the being of God, the unity of his nature, and his moral character and government; as also concerning the rule of human duty, and the doctrine of a future state, do not sufficiently consider how they came by that knowledge; and thinking the whole system to be very rational and natural, they are apt to conclude that it must therefore have been very *obvious*, and that all the particulars of it could not but have been known to all mankind. But, in fact, there is no man living whose knowledge of these subjects was not derived from instruction, and the information of others; and therefore there is no man living who, from his own sense of things and experience, can be deemed a competent judge of what the powers

powers of his own nature are able to do in this case. For the solution of this important question, we must have recourse to history only, and see what mankind have *in fact* attained to in a variety of circumstances.

Now it appears, by the most careful investigation, that all the useful and practical knowledge of religion, of which we find any traces among the Eastern nations and the Greeks, was, by their own confession, derived to them from their ancestors, in more early ages. Among the Greeks it was more particularly acknowledged, that their wisdom and religion came from the Barbarians, and especially those who were from the East, many of whom arrived in Greece by the way of Thrace. It is well known to have been a long time before men pretended to *reason* at all upon subjects of morals or religion. The celebrated *wisdom of the East*, and also that of the earliest Greek philosophers, consisted in nothing else than in delivering the *traditions of the antients*.

It is another remarkable fact, that it is in the earliest ages of the heathen world that we are to look for the purest notions of re-

ligion among them ; and that, as we descend into the lower ages, we find religion growing more and more corrupt, even among the most intelligent of the heathens, who arrived at great refinements of taste, and made considerable improvements in science. This was the case universally till the promulgation of christianity in the world. History informs us that the worship of one God, without images, was in all nations prior to Polytheism. Varro says, expressly, that the Romans worshipped God without images for one hundred and seventy years. This was also the case with all the nations of the East, with the Greeks, and even throughout this Western part of the world. We also find that the belief of future rewards and punishments was never questioned among the Greeks, till they began to reason upon the subject ; when, rejecting the old traditions, and not finding satisfactory evidence of any other kind, they came at length to disbelieve them. This scepticism and infidelity was introduced by the philosophers, and was from them diffused through all ranks of men, both in Greece and Rome.

These remarkable facts certainly favour the supposition, that the most important doctrines

doctrines of natural religion were communicated by divine revelation to the first parents of mankind.

We even find the most acute of modern unbelievers acknowledging the improbability that the doctrine of the divine unity, and others abovementioned, should naturally have been the first religion of mankind. Bolingbroke says that Polytheism and Idolatry have so close a connection with the ideas and affections of rude and ignorant men, that one of them could not fail to be their first religious principle, and the other their first religious practice ; and Mr. Hume, after discussing the matter very minutely, acknowledges that the doctrine of one God is not naturally the religion of mankind. The view of this writer is to make it probable that the rudiments of religious knowledge were acquired by mankind in the same manner as the rudiments of other kinds of knowledge, and that similar advances were made in both ; but the testimony of history is uniformly and clearly against him. Indeed it cannot, surely, be supposed, that, according to his principles, the divine being should leave mankind under a necessity of forming either no religion at all, or a false and dangerous one.

Is it not, therefore, more agreeable to our ideas of the wisdom and goodness of God, to suppose that, at the same time that he instructed the first parents of mankind how to provide for their subsistence in the world, and imparted to them that knowledge which was necessary for the purpose (without which they must soon have perished) and when he taught them the rudiments of speech (without which, notwithstanding their superior capacities, they would have been little superior to brute animals, perhaps, for several centuries) he gave them to understand the more important particulars concerning their relation to himself, as their creator, preserver, and final judge; and that he instructed them in those acts of religious worship which correspond to these relations; and also that he enjoined them the observation of the most important rules of social duty, and the proper government of themselves in other respects? All the knowledge we have of history agrees with this supposition, and the thing is far from being improbable, or absurd in itself.

When this primitive religion of mankind became corrupted, there seems to have been no probability that it would ever have been restored to its original purity by natural means.

means. Rather, the continued operation of the same causes might be expected to render it more and more depraved. The only probable resource was the knowledge of the studious and the learned ; but the knowledge of the Greek philosophers was confined to their professed disciples, few of them taking any pains to enlighten the minds of the bulk of the people. Indeed, they generally held the common people in great contempt, considering them as incapable of being benefited by their instructions. And, on the other hand, the bulk of the people either despised the philosophers, or thought themselves unconcerned in any thing that passed within their schools. All that they minded were the religious rites of their country, as directed by their priests ; and the philosophers themselves were so far from attempting any reformation of the prevailing idolatry (though it often countenanced the most abominable vices) that they both conformed to it themselves, and enforced conformity to it in others, even as a duty of moral obligation.

At length, however, more and more of the common people began to listen to the philosophers, and then all the remains of the old and useful traditions, of the world

being made by God, and that men would be called to an account for their conduct in this world, when they should live in another, were given up. For the great object of the greek philosophers was to exclude the interposition of the deity both in the formation of the world and every thing else, supposing it to have been formed either by the fortuitous concourse of atoms, or in some other necessary and mechanical way ; and the boasted end of many of their sects was to deliver the minds of men from the fear of the Gods, and the terrors of a world to come.

It must be observed that there is a striking difference between the moral writings of those philosophers who wrote before, and those who wrote after the promulgation of christianity. The latter lean much more to what has been shewn to have been the primitive religion of mankind, and they inculcate purer morals. This, though they do not acknowledge it, was, no doubt, the effect of christianity, with the maxims of which, and the happy influence of them, the philosophers must have been acquainted. In various other respects, also, the moral state of the heathen world was much improved by christianity. Eusebius enumerates

merates many absurd and vicious customs, which, having prevailed before the promulgation of it, grew into disuse afterwards. The philosophers, however, notwithstanding the improvement of their moral system, were the greatest opposers of christianity, and the strongest bulwark of idolatry ; and when the glaring absurdities of the popular worship were exposed by christian writers, they invented plausible apologies for it.

That I may impress the minds of those who are not much read in antient history with a just sense of the value of revelation, I shall point out the several steps by which the primitive religion of mankind became corrupted, and give some idea of the consequence of that corruption with respect to the morals of the people ; and that such persons may be more fully satisfied how much we are, in fact, indebted to revelation, even where natural reason has had the freest scope, I shall, at the same time shew how very nearly the sentiments of the most celebrated modern unbelievers, who had an opportunity of knowing, and selecting whatever they approved from revelation, tally with those of the heathen philosophers, who never heard of it, with respect to the

important doctrines of the unity, the moral character and government of God, the rule of human duty, and the expectation of a state of retribution after death.

## SECTION II.

*Of the corruption of theology in particular.*

THE primary and great cause of idolatry was low and unworthy notions of God, from whence men were led to consider all that we ascribe to God as too much for *one being*, what no one being could have made, or could properly attend to afterwards. They also thought it beneath the supreme being to concern himself with the government of the inferior parts of the creation. They, therefore, imagined that he had *deputies* to act under him ; and the first objects to which they ascribed this delegated power, were the sun, moon, and stars, which, on account of their splendour,

dour, and beneficial influence, they supposed to be either animated themselves, or directed by intelligent beings. That the worship of the stars, and other heavenly bodies, was the earliest species of idolatry, is agreeable to all antient history.

The temptation to this kind of idolatry appears, from the book of Job, to have been very strong, in the earlier ages of the world ; and it is evident, from several circumstances, that it had a very firm hold on the minds of men. It was for affirming the stars to be inanimate bodies, which was considered as denying their divinity, and for advancing that the sun is a body of fire, and that the moon is a habitable world, that Anaxagoras was accused at Athens for *impiety*. Even Socrates thought him guilty of great presumption and arrogance ; and Plato speaks of his opinion as leading to atheism, and a denial of divine providence. This worship of the stars is what he himself chiefly recommended to the people.

Next to the worship of the sun, moon, and stars, succeeded that of *dead men*. This arose from customs which were originally intended to express no more than a just regard for their merit and services ; but from this they proceeded, gradually, to acts

acts of worship properly religious, erecting altars to them, and praying to them, in any place and at any time. This introduced the worship of images in human forms, whereas they had before contented themselves with erecting pillars, or even consecrating rude stones and altars to their deities. The philosophers were far from discouraging this practice of worshipping dead heroes. Cicero in particular much approves of the custom of paying divine honours to famous men, and regarding them as Gods.

During this progress of idolatry, the worship of the true God was gradually superseded, and the rites of it became intermixed with those of the inferior deities. What contributed to confound these things the more, was that to most of the heavenly bodies, and also to deified men, were ascribed the names and attributes of the one true God, till the rites peculiar to each of them could be no longer distinguished; and at length the worship of inferior beings engrossed all the regards of mankind, the worship of the true God being intirely excluded.

Besides the worship of the celestial Gods, and of dead men, we also find Gods of an intermediate

intermediate nature, such as are now usually called *genii*. Of these there were supposed to be various classes, and the worship that was paid to them made a considerable article in the heathen system.

As if these three sources could not supply divinities enow, we find that even different *names* of the same God, and acknowledged to be the same, were made to pass for different deities, and had their peculiar religious rites and worship. Similar to this are the virgin Marys of different places, in Popish countries. It was another source of the multiplicity of heathen Gods, that the *symbols* and *images* of their principal Gods were converted into deities, and made the objects of religious worship, as Fire among the Chaldeans, and the Bull, and other animals, among the Egyptians.

There can be no doubt but that the images erected to their Gods were generally supposed to have divine powers in them. The philosopher Stilpo of Megara was banished by the Areopagus at Athens for asserting that the statue of Minerva, made by Phidias, was not a God; and all that he ventured to alledge in his defence, was that this celebrated piece of statuary was not a *God*, but a *Goddess*.

Farther,

Farther, all the *parts of the universe* being considered as so many parts of the divinity by some, or expressions of his power by others, were made objects of religious worship. Even the qualities and *affections* of mankind, and also the *accidents* to which they are exposed were worshipped, as if a separate intelligence had presided over each of them; and some of these were not only natural evils, but even things of a morally vicious nature. Thus there was at Rome an altar to *the Fever*, another to *Evil fortune*, and others to *Lust* and *Pleasure*. At Athens there was a religious service appropriated to *Impudence*, and it was done by the advice of *Epimenides*, who passed for a great diviner, and prophet.

We find, in fact, that deities of a bad character engrossed more of the attention of the heathen world, in general, than those of which they entertained a good opinion, these being thought to be of themselves disposed to do them kind offices. Even Plutarch cites with approbation the opinion of Xenocrates, who, speaking of unlucky days and festivals, which were celebrated by scourging, beatings, lamentations, fastings, ill boding words, and obscene expressions, said that these things could not be pleasing to

to the good Demons, but that there are in the air about us certain great and powerful natures, of cross and morose tempers, which take pleasure in these things, and having obtained them, do no farther mischief.

The Egyptians paid divine honours not only to the useful animals, as the Ibis and Ichneumon, but also to the Crocodile, and other noxious animals. Worshipping some of these Gods from love, and others from fear, we are not surprised to find that the same Gods which they worshipped in some of their religious festivals, were the constant objects of their curses and execrations in others.

Such were the Gods whom we find to have been the objects of religious worship among the most celebrated heathen nations ; and from the idea which has been given of their characters, we may easily imagine what kind of attention they were supposed to give to human affairs ; but the doctrine of a *providence*, without which the belief of a God can have no influence, was, on other accounts, exceedingly imperfect and confused among the heathens. It was, more especially, not a little embarrassed with their notion of the influence of *fate* and *fortune* on human affairs. They even imagined

gined that there was a fate which was uncontrollable even by the greatest of their Gods ; and *Fortune* they considered as a deity altogether blind and capricious, so that no kind of conduct could recommend them to her favourable notice more than another. Besides, the providence of the greatest of their Gods was hardly supposed to extend any farther than to the outward conveniences of life. They therefore prayed to them for life, health, riches, or power, but seldom or never for wisdom, or any moral endowment.

This, it will be said, was the religion of the *vulgar* ; but the same was the religion which the philosophers conformed to, and enjoined. They even laid great stress upon the strict observance of it, and made it a matter of moral obligation. Indeed, their own real sentiments were not much more favourable to virtue. The learned Varro seems to value himself, as having deserved well of his fellow citizens, because he had not only given an account of the Gods which the Romans ought to worship, but of the powers and offices belonging to each of them, that the people might not be at a loss whom to address on any particular occasion. Socrates, the Stoicks, and the best

best of the philosophers generally speak of *the Gods*, in the plural number, and seldom or never distinguish any one being as supreme with respect to the rest. Plato, indeed, in one passage of his works, speaks of one supreme God, but as a thing that was not fit to be communicated to the vulgar, and in general he also speaks of *the Gods* in the plural number. Plutarch, who lived in the times of christianity, acknowledges, indeed, one supreme being; but he also admits of a coeternal evil principle.

The generality of the philosophers held the whole animated system of the world, or at least the soul of it (of which every separate intelligence was apart) to be God. Balbus, among a number of excellent things in proof of the being of a God (in that celebrated treatise of Cicero concerning *the nature of the Gods*) maintains that the world is an animal, and has intelligence, that it is reasonable, wise, and happy, and therefore a God. The great argument of the Stoicks for the unity of God, is that there is but one world. In later times some of the philosophers endeavoured to turn the popular religion into allegory, pretending the Jupiter, for instance, meant the air, and Juno the earth, &c.

Many

Many of the philosophers denied that there is any providence of the Gods at all. Pliny, the great naturalist, represents it as ridiculous to imagine that the God who is supreme gives any attention to the affairs of men ; and many were of opinion that the Gods attend to the greater events of the world only. Indeed, it was the object of many of the sects of philosophy, and particularly the Epicureans, who were very numerous about the time of Christ, and especially in the higher ranks of life, to exclude the interposition of God both in making and governing the world.

Of what advantage can such religion as this, the outlines of which I have been describing, be supposed to have been to the interest of virtue and good morals. Indeed, religion and morals were never considered by the heathens as having any proper connection at all. It was never supposed to be any part of the business of a priest to teach the people virtue, their office being confined to the due performance of religious rites and ceremonies. When the Gods were supposed to be offended, and public calamities were considered as tokens of the divine displeasure, they never had recourse to repentance and reformation, as a means

a means of averting their anger; but always to some more exact or more expensive ceremony. The usual method of making atonement at Rome, was a solemn procession, and driving a nail into the temple of Jupiter. Lord Herbert acknowledges that all the religion of the Gentiles was sunk into mere superstition.

Every thing that the common people had any opportunity of hearing or seeing belonging to religion, among the Greeks or Romans, instead of inspiring good sentiments, and leading to regularity of conduct, generally tended to inflame their passions, and furnished excuses for the undue gratification of them. Public games and plays, in which the flagitious actions of the Gods were represented, were considered as acts of religion, encouraged by their deities, and celebrated in honour of them; and several circumstances lead us to think that they had a very immoral tendency. In Terence we find a young man encouraging himself in an act of lewdness by the example of Jupiter, and the Cretans apologized for their addicitedness to the love of boys by the example of the same God and Ganimede.

Indeed,

Indeed, it was hardly possible to attend upon, and especially to assist in the festivals of some of the heathen Gods, without committing actual wickedness, and contracting the very worst of habits. Bacchus was worshipped with the most indecent revelling and drunkenness, and the greatest philosophers never remonstrated against such practices. It was a saying of Plato, that to drink to excess, was not allowable, except upon the festival of that God who is the giver of wine. The licentiousness of such religious rites as these was so notorious, that it was not thought safe for married women to go to the feast of Bacchus, Ceres, or Cybele. Hence a saying of Aristippus, concerning a remarkably chaste woman, that she could not be corrupted even at the Bacchanals.

In the *Ludi Florales* at Rome, the chief part of the solemnity was managed by a set of shameless prostitutes, who ran up and down naked, dancing in lascivious postures, and this custom was not discountenanced, but encouraged by the gravest magistrates. Strabo relates that there was at Corinth a temple of Venus, so rich, that it maintained above a thousand prostitutes, dedicated to the service of the Goddess.

Herodotus,

Herodotus, and the most credible historians assure us, that by a law of the Babylonians, every woman, a native of the country, was obliged to receive the embraces of the first stranger that offered himself in the precincts of some of their temples, before she could be married. There were customs similar to this in many other parts of the East. Even sodomy and bestiality were openly practised in some of their temples, and the figures of the parts of generation, carved in wood, were carried about in many of their processions, and had divine honours paid to them.

The mischiefs of this religion were not confined to the encouragement of the softer vices. It even authorized the most horrible *cruelties*, so that the religious rites of the heathens were shocking to humanity. In some of the festivals of Bacchus, the priests used to tear and devour the entrails of goats, raw and reeking, in imitation of their God. The priests of Cybele castrated themselves, and in their processions made the most hideous noises and howling, cutting themselves till the blood gushed out, as they went along. The priests of Baal, also, were wont to cut and slash themselves in the same manner. At Sparta boys were often whipped in honour

nour of Diana till they died, in which case they were honoured with a public and splendid funeral ; and, in some towns of Arcadia, women were whipped with the same severity.

Human sacrifices prevailed all over the heathen world, and in no country were they more common than among our ancestors the ancient Britons.

On some occasions the Britons were used to construct large images of wicker work, which they filled with living men, and especially prisoners taken in war ; and, setting fire to it, put to death, in this most cruel manner, all the unhappy wretches it contained. In other respects, also, the religion of the Britons was no better, but worse, and more barbarous than that of the Greeks and Romans. The whole country was held in a state of the most slavish subjection to their priests, the Druids, who had a power of excluding persons from the privilege of attending their sacred rites ; after which excommunication, the person who had incurred it was cut off from all human intercourse, and every advantage of civil society. The exercise of this horrid religion was, by Augustus, prohibited in

Gaul, under pain of death. The Britons were not at that time subject to the Romans.

Both the Peruvians and the Mexicans used human victims, and the latter are said to have sacrificed, at one particular time only, five thousand prisoners of war.

Human sacrifices were even used in the Roman empire, as Porphyry, a heathen writer, informs us, till the time of the Emperor Adrian, who ordered them in most places to be abolished, but this was after the promulgation of christianity. The same writer says, that in his own times, and in the city of Rome itself, it was the custom to sacrifice a man at the feast of Jupiter Latiaris, and Lactantius a christian writer says, that the same thing was done in his time.

These human sacrifices were thought to be of all others, the most acceptable offerings to their Gods, being the strongest proof they could give of their devotedness to them ; and so far were public calamities from leading them to renounce this horrid custom, that they were always a means of confirming them in it. It had grown into a custom at Carthage to sacrifice not *free men*, as they had done originally, but only *slaves*, or prisoners taken in war, at the

feast of Saturn ; but after a war in which they were great sufferers, they concluded that their losses were owing to the displeasure of the Gods, on account of their ignoble offerings, and immediately they sacrificed three hundred youths of the best families in Carthage.

Among other detestable methods of divination, one was the murder of infants, and others, who were sacrificed on purpose, that by raking into their entrails, they might gain an insight into futurity, as appears from the testimony of Herodotus, Cicero, Lucan, Juvenal, Tacitus, Philostratus, Porphyry, and many other learned Pagans, as well as from the intimations of the sacred writers.

When the blood of young children was made use of, it was not deemed sufficient in some cases merely to put them to death, for it was imagined to be necessary for their purpose that their death should be lingering and painful.

The Cimbri ripped open the bowels of human victims, and from them formed a judgment concerning future events, and the Celtæ divined by the agonies and convulsions of men offered in sacrifice, and from the effusion of their blood.

All heathen nations, when they wanted to pry into futurity, or to engage the assistance of their Gods in any enterprize, at the best, had recourse to the most absurd methods of learning their will ; as by observing the appearance of the entrails of beasts offered in sacrifice, the flight of birds, or the ravings of men and women, who had the art of throwing themselves into convulsions, and pretending to be inspired. The solemn *auspices* of the Romans consisted in observing the manner in which chickens pecked their food, and to this every Roman general was obliged to give the closest attention every morning. A thousand things of this nature might be enumerated, every heathen nation abounding with them ; and there are many remains of them in all countries in the world, the nations of Christendom, and this country, by no means excepted. All these methods of consulting the Gods could rise from nothing but the lowest, and the most absurd notions of the divine power and providence.

It will be said that philosophy must certainly have been some check upon these enormities ; but, strange as it may seem, this does not appear to have been the case. Human sacrifices, indeed, became less frequent,

quent, and were, in a manner, abolished both in Greece and Rome; but this does not seem to have been owing to the philosophy, but to the greater humanity of later times. The philosophers were so far from attempting the reformation of any religious rite, however abominable, that they are known to have encouraged the most absurd of all their superstitions, and to have connived at least, at the most scandalous of them. Socrates, and their best moralists, strongly recommend even the divinations, and oracles of their times; and when Aristotle expresses his disapprobation of obscene pictures, he excepts those of the Gods, which religion had sanctified.

If we consider the real sentiments of the philosophers, abstracted from any relation to the people; or connection with civil government, they will be found by no means to furnish a sufficient foundation for a spirit of just and useful devotion, consisting of the sentiments of reverence and love to God, confidence in his providence, and a regard to virtue from his authority. Those who are thought to have had the most sublime notions concerning the deity, after the times of christianity, seem to have been against all external worship of the supreme God.

God. Cicero, in all his treatise concerning *human duty*, never draws any argument to enforce the practice of it from the authority, or command of God. Maximus Tyrius has a whole dissertation to prove that we ought not to pray at all, and Seneca represents it as altogether needless to apply to God by prayer. *Make thyself happy*, says he. But the language of the Stoicks was not uniform, or consistent, on this, or on several other subjects. Notwithstanding they speak much of God, or the Gods, they never mention repentance, and confession of sin, as any part of our duty.

If the heathen philosophers had been impressed with a proper reverence for God, they could never have indulged themselves in the indecent practice of *common swearing*, which they seem to have done without the least restraint. The dialogues of Plato, in which Socrates is always a speaker, are full of oaths ; and so are the works of Marcus Antoninus.

It will be said that such a religion, and such philosophy, were the produce of an early age ; and that it may be presumed that, in time, men would have formed juster notions of the attributes and moral government of God, have attained to a steady

and practical dependance upon him, and have expressed their devotional sentiments by proper acts of homage. But we shall be obliged to abandon this flattering idea, when we consider what has been advanced upon these subjects by philosophers of a more enlightened age, who have abandoned revelation, and have pretended, at least, to be guided by nature only.

Mr. Hobbes says, that whatever is incorporeal is nothing at all, and he makes religion a business of the state only. Mr. Hume subverts the very foundation of all our reasoning from effects to causes, so that from what we see round us, we cannot with certainty infer an intelligent author. Mr. Blount, the author of a celebrated treatise called *The oracles of reason*, represents the opinion of the origin of good and evil from two different eternal principles, the one good and the other evil, as not unreasonable; and he makes objections to the duty of prayer. Mr. Chubb expressly denies the doctrine of a particular providence, and not only speaks of the impropriety of praying to God, but even suggests a suspicion that it may be displeasing to the divine being.

Bolingbroke, who has been much extolled as a writer and philosopher, blames even the Pagan theists for flattering human nature, when they taught that a good man imitates God. He will admit of no proof that God is a lover of mankind, and made man to be happy. He altogether rejects the scripture doctrine of a particular providence, and the notion that God is attentive to the prayers and wants of men. He acknowledges that God is a being of almighty power, and infinite wisdom; but he says, that we must not pretend to ascribe to him any *moral* attributes, as holiness, justice, or goodness. He says that he neither has these qualities, nor any thing equivalent to them.

## S E C T I O N III.

*Of the moral sentiments of the Heathens.*

**H**AVING taken a view of the state of theology in the Gentile world, I shall proceed to consider some of their general maxims relating to *morals*, and especially such as were patronized by the philosophers;

sophers ; and we cannot but be sensible that they were by no means favourable to virtue, taken in its just extent. At the close of this I shall also shew how modern unbelievers have relapsed into the same loose kind of morality.

Many of the philosophers maintained that there is nothing just or unjust by nature, but only by positive law and custom. This was the opinion of Theodorus, Archelaus, and Aristippus, of the Alexandrian school, which prevailed the most a little before the time of Christ. All the earlier philosophers allowed too much to the obligation of positive law. Even Socrates himself represents it as essential to the character of a good man to obey, without reserve, the laws of his country. On the other hand, Epicurus taught that a man is to do every thing for his own sake, his own happiness being the great rule of life.

The most distinguished system of morals among the Greeks was that of the Stoicks, and it is generally esteemed to have been peculiarly favourable to virtue. It carries, indeed, an air of greatness and sublimity in it ; but when examined will be found to be no friend to the humane and pleasing virtues. It was the great maxim of the Stoicks

icks that the soul of man, being of the same nature with God, is self sufficient for virtue and happiness, insomuch that it is not in the power of the Gods themselves to make a good man unhappy. Nay, so arrogantly did some of them talk, that they represented men as superior to the Gods ; saying that these are wise by the necessity of their nature, but men by choice. Such notions as these could not but lay a foundation for a very dangerous and insufferable pride.

To support this strange hypothesis, with respect to a world in which the wisest and best of men are subject to pain and death, they were obliged to maintain, and they did it resolutely, that pain is no evil, and that length of time makes no addition to happiness. To promote an insensibility of pain, they maintained that men must suppress all passions, whether they were of the nature of love or hatred. They would not allow of anger, even at vice or injustice ; and to make it the easier for persons to stifle their resentment on these occasions, they frequently represented all crimes as involuntary, and consequently such things as no person could have any reason to be surprized or offended at, especially since no

body could be a sufferer but the injurious person himself. For it was the great maxim of Epictetus, that it is naturally impossible for one man to be in fault, and another to be the sufferer. It is certainly very hard to conceive what real virtue such maxims as these could produce ; and we shall see their mischievous tendency in several respects hereafter.

It is not difficult to point out several general maxims relating to morals, among modern unbelievers, which bear as unfriendly an aspect upon human virtue, if the idea that was given of it in the first part of these Institutes be just. Mr. Hume, the most acute of all modern unbelievers, confounds natural and moral qualities ; representing virtue to consist of any agreeable disposition or accomplishment, without distinction. Among the virtues he particularly mentions wit, ingenuity, eloquence, quickness of conception, facility of expression, delicacy of taste, politeness, cleanliness, and even force of body. On the other hand he excludes from the rank of virtues *humility* and *self denial*, saying that they are rejected by men of sense, because they serve no manner of purpose. Spinoza also speaks of *repentance* as a mean, unreasonable,

sonable, and despicable thing. Agreeable to these maxims, Mr. Hume speaks of a certain degree of *pride*, and *self valuation*, the want of which is a vice, and the opposite to which is meanness. It is possible, indeed, to explain these terms so as to vindicate Mr. Hume's assertions; but if we collect his meaning from all that he has said upon the subject, it is impossible not to conceive that he intends to stigmatize as a vice, that which is recommended in the gospel as an amiable virtue, as peculiarly pleasing in the sight of God, and what even right reason approves of.

Mr. Chubb confines the whole business of criminality to acts which affects the community. He speaks of it as unworthy of God to resent any blasphemies against himself, and he treats with nearly the same indifference all injuries to private persons only. Bolingbroke also says, that all the sanctions of the law of nature affect men collectively considered, and not as individuals. So low an opinion had Mr. Chubb of the excellent and truly rational morals of our Saviour, that he scruples not to assert, that all the alteration he made in Judaism was for the worse, that those precepts by which Christianity is peculiarly distin-

guished, are less perfect than those which prevailed before, and that they are inconsistent with the welfare and happiness of mankind.

The obligation of *sincerity* and integrity seems to have been very weak in the minds of several unbelievers. Hobbes advanced that that idolatry to which a man is compelled by the terrors of death, is not idolatry. Others have adopted the same maxim, and have even ridiculed christians for dying martyrs to the truth.

The apologies that were made for vice by the Stoicks, have likewise been adopted by unbelievers of modern times. Lord Herbert says, that those persons are not lightly to be condemned who are carried to sin by their bodily constitution; and he particularly instances in lust and anger. Such persons he represents as no more to be blamed than a dropsical person for his immoderate thirst, or a lethargical person for his laziness and inactivity. He also apologizes for many vices, as not being committed out of enmity to God, but with a view to men's own particular advantage or pleasure, being chosen by them under the appearance of some good. He might not attend to it, but certainly there is no crime, for

for which this maxim will not furnish an apology.

The most obvious of all virtues, and those of the most acknowledged obligation, are the *social* ones. When any of the social duties are neglected, some of our fellow creatures are injured, and cannot forbear complaining, or seeking some method of redress. Indeed, without a tolerable observance of social duties, society could not subsist. Public wrongs are always things of great notoriety, so that mankind cannot but attend to them, and be convinced of their malignant and destructive nature. Among all nations, therefore, we find a pretty just notion of the distinction between right and wrong; and the duties of society have always been the most generally practised. But even this branch of the system of morals was exceedingly imperfect among the Greeks and Romans, and was by no means favourable to the sentiments of a refined, generous, and extensive humanity, which considers all mankind as brethren, the common offspring of one great and good parent, and admonishes us to do to others as we would that they should do to us.

The Greeks, in general, do not appear to have had any higher object than the good of their respective states, or at most that of the community of Greeks. Even Socrates, when he directs his hearers to consider all Greeks as brethren, speaks of the Barbarians (by whom were meant all other nations) as their natural enemies; and he prescribes such rules of conduct with respect to them, as are not reconcilable to the common rules of humanity. It is well known to have been a maxim at Sparta, that probity and every thing else is to be sacrificed to the good of the state. These Spartans, having conquered a neighbouring nation, the Helots, kept them for several hundred years in a state of the most abject slavery; and lest they should grow too numerous, they frequently butchered them in cold blood; and their youths were not only connived at, but applauded when they killed them by surprize, to enure them to the bloody and deceitful business of war. For with them a victory gained by artifice was reckoned to be of double value.

In most of the heathen states we find customs utterly irreconcileable with humanity and virtue, particularly that of exposing sickly children, to be devoured by wild

wild beasts. In Sparta every child was examined by public inspectors, who determined whether it should be brought up or exposed, and for this they are commended by Plutarch. Plato, in his book of laws, orders, that when persons are past the age of having strong children, they should use means to prevent their being born alive, or kill them after they were born. Aristotle also says, that there should be laws to prevent the education of weak children. In several ancient heathen nations, the aged and infirm were exposed. Among the Persians this was done without any scruple. At Rome it was the general custom to leave their old and sick slaves to perish on a certain island in the Tiber; and the favourite entertainment of the Roman people, for many ages, was the barbarous exhibition of gladiators, some of whom fought with each other, and some with wild beasts. In this manner many hundreds of slaves, carefully trained up for the purpose, have been sacrificed at one time. This was one of the horrid customs which owed its abolition to the mild spirit of christianity.

One would have thought that compassion for the distressed had been so deeply rooted in the human heart, and had so much

the

the sanction of natural conscience, that it could not have been in the power of philosophy to exclude it from a system of morals ; and yet those great moralists the Stoicks absolutely proscribed it. Their *wise man* must have no passions, and consequently no sympathy. Epictetus, indeed, allows a philosopher to condole with his common friends *in words*, if that will afford them any relief ; but he bids them be very careful that, in reality, they *feel* nothing all the time.

Some of the philosophers recommend the forgiveness of injuries, but others praise a spirit of *revenge*, particularly Democritus ; and when Plato introduces Socrates as recommending forgiveness, he speaks of it as contrary to the sentiments of the generality of the philosophers.

The obligation of *truth* seems to be equal, if not superior to that of humanity and compassion, on account of its obvious importance to society, and yet the maxims of some of the philosophers tended to undermine it. The Stoicks thought that lying was lawful if it was profitable, and Plato says, that man may tell a lie who knows how to do it at a proper time.

Having found the Greek philosophers such loose moralists with respect to the social virtues above mentioned, we cannot expect from them any great strictness with respect to the *commerce of the sexes*. None of the philosophers ever represented simple fornication, especially on the part of the man, as any vice at all, though its tendency is so pernicious to society, and the practice of it so much depraves the heart. Cato commended a young man for frequenting the public stews, and Cicero expressly speaks of fornication as a thing that was never found fault with.

Many of the *customs* of the Greeks and Romans, and especially their religious customs promoted a disposition to lewdness. Some of these have been already mentioned. At Sparta, young women appeared naked in the public exercises, and when married women had no children, their husbands were encouraged to lend them to other men, a custom which Plutarch vindicates. This was also agreeable to the doctrine of the Stoicks, and it is well known that that rigid Stoick Cato of Utica, lent his wife to his friend Hortensius. Plato, in his book of Laws, recommends a community of women, and he advises that soldiers be not restrained

strained with respect to any kind of sensual indulgence, even the most unnatural species of it, when they are upon an expedition.

Incestuous marriages were common in some Gentile nations, especially Egypt and Persia; but they were condemned in Greece and Rome.

Let us now see what maxims relating to the mutual intercourse of mankind have been adopted by the more celebrated of our modern unbelievers. Bayle says, that the prohibition of *revenge* is contrary to the law of reason and nature, and Tindal makes the doctrine of the *forgiveness of injuries* an objection to christianity. This writer also speaks very slightly of the obligation of *truth*.

Unbelievers in general make very light of the obligation of *chastity*, especially Tindal and Bolingbroke. This last mentioned writer does not admit that *adultery* (which, in ancient heathen states, was generally punished with death) is a violation of the law of nature, and he says that *polygamy* is founded on the law of nature. *Incest* he admits to be unnatural, but only in the highest degrees, as between fathers and daughters, sons and mothers; but concerning this he does not pretend to be very positive. If

If men do not feel and acknowledge the obligation of social virtue, it cannot be expected that they should think themselves under any restraint where the rights of others have no place. When the authority of God, and of the magistrate, are both out of the question, the reasons for *purity* and *decency of conduct*, derived from nature only, cannot be supposed to weigh much against the bias of inclination. To provide for a man's happiness in this life was the great object of all the philosophers of antiquity; and though some of them considered happiness as consisting in virtue only, and others in tranquillity of mind as well as of body, Aristippus, and the Alexandrian school, which was one of the last that was formed, made *corporeal pleasure* only to be the ultimate end of man.

The Stoicks allowed of very great indulgence of the sences, and were generally great drinkers. Cato of Utica was remarkably addicted to this vice, so was Zeno, the founder of the sect, and Chrysippus died in consequence of drinking to excess at a sacrifice.

The maxims of the heathen philosophers with respect to the commerce of the sexes have been already mentioned, and their practice

practice with respect to those vices which are justly styled *unnatural* was not less exceptionable; and though it is hardly credible, yet these vices also had too much of the sanction of some legislators and *philosophers*, and were countenanced by the example of many of them. Xenophon informs us that *sodomy* was encouraged by the public laws of several of the states of Greece. It was more especially so among the Cretans, in order to prevent their having too many children. Solon, one of the seven wise men of Greece, and the celebrated lawgiver of Athens, forbade this practice to slaves, which necessarily conveys the idea of his thinking it fit for free men only. According to Cicero, the Greek philosophers not only generally practised, but even gloried in this vice, and Plutarch informs us that many parents would not suffer their children to keep the company of those philosophers, who pretended to be fond of them. Diogenes was remarkable for indulging himself in the most abominable practices openly, and without any sense of shame, affecting, according to the maxim of the Cynics, to live according to nature. These unnatural vices were increased in a most astonishing manner about the

the time of the promulgation of christianity. Seneca says, that in his time they were practised openly, and without shame at Rome.

When *pleasure* was considered as the great end of living, and when the authority of God and of conscience was disclaimed, it cannot be wondered that when ever this end of life was despaired of, life itself should be abandoned. We therefore naturally expect that *self-murder* should be recommended by the Epicureans, and other philosophers whose principles were similar to theirs, when life should become a burden ; and in this we are not disappointed. But it was chiefly recommended and practised by the Stoicks, who pretended to renounce pleasure, as an act of heroism and magnanimity. The usual saying of their gravest philosophers on this subject was, *If the house be smoaky, the door is open, and you may walk out* ; and history informs us that many of the most eminent Stoicks died by their own hands, especially the famous Cato of Utica, and Zeno the founder of the Stoicks, who killed himself when he was very old, after breaking a finger which proved to be very painful to him.

Sometimes, indeed, these philosophers talked in a different strain, and advised persons not to abandon life, till God, who placed them in it, should give the signal; but, it is in vain to expect a perfect consistency in any of the systems of the philosophers. They were perpetually charging one another, and indeed very justly, with inconsistencies, and many other absurdities. Whatever the philosophers might think, or practice, in this respect, the legislators of antiquity did not adopt the same maxims. For, in several ancient states, we find self-murder branded by an ignominious treatment of the body, and other penalties.

If we look into the writings of many of the modern unbelievers, we shall find them as little restrained in their pleasures while they live, and as little scrupulous with respect to abandoning life when it becomes disagreeable to them. Helvetius, in his celebrated treatise, *De l' Esprit*, represents the love of pleasure as the voice of God; and lest we should mistake his idea of pleasure, he says, that it is of two kinds only; consisting either in the gratification of the senses, or in procuring the means of gratifying them. He also says, that it is not agreeable to good policy to represent *galantry*

*lantry* (under which term he includes commerce with married women) as a vice in a moral sense. Indeed the design of his whole treatise is to shew that happiness consists in sensual pleasure, and wisdom in pursuing it.

Modern unbelievers are almost universally advocates for *self-murder*, and Mr. Blount, who wrote the oracles of reason, both recommended it, and practised it upon himself. The same has been the end of many other unbelievers.

Such having been the state of the heathen world, we shall see the propriety of those descriptions of it which we find in several parts of the New Testament, and which are suspected by many persons, who have not a sufficient knowledge of ancient times, to be hyperbolical and exaggerated. For though every corruption of genuine christianity has tended, as will be shewn in its proper place, to debase the spirit of it, and to defeat the great purpose of it, in reforming the world, and promoting purity of morals; the corruption was never so great, not even in the darkest ages of popery, but that the belief of it was more favourable to virtue than the belief of the prevailing doctrines of the heathens at the time of the promulgation of christianity.

We

We often complain, and very justly, of the corruption of the times; and such complaints were never more particularly loud than in the period preceding the reformation; but the corruption was still short of that which (as we learn from the heathen writers themselves) generally prevailed in the heathen world.

St. Peter, speaking of the Gentiles, says that *they walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.* And the apostle Paul says, that *being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness of their hearts, they gave themselves up to lasciviousness, to commit all iniquity with greediness.* There are also many other passages in the writings of St. Paul, which represent the state of the heathen world as exceedingly corrupt indeed, and it was far from being in the way of being mended by the philosophy of those times.

## SECTION

## SECTION IV.

*Of the doctrine of a future state among the Heathens.*

WE shall the less wonder at the imperfect state of morals, both with respect to theory and practice, in the heathen world, when we consider that they were destitute of those great sanctions of virtue, which are derived from the consideration of the authority and moral government of God, especially as extending to a life beyond the grave. We find more of the belief of a future life of retribution in the earlier ages of the heathen world; but, if we judge of it from the representation of the poets, among whom only we must look for the real opinions of the vulgar, and the maxims of the popular religion, we shall find that, about the time of the earliest Greek poets, the popular notion of a future state was such as could be of no farther use than to restrain the greater kinds

of crimes, but that it could furnish no motives to aim at any high degree of purity, and real excellence of character.

According to the poets, the state of the best men after death was very melancholy, and undesirable, notwithstanding the charming descriptions which they sometimes give of it. In Homer Achilles in the Elysian shades tells Ulysses, who is represented as meeting him there, that he had rather be a rustic on earth, serving a poor man for hire, and having but scanty fare, than have a large empire over the dead.

Lame as these popular notions of a future state were, the Greeks and Romans had no opportunity of having their minds impressed with them, but by listening to the traditions of their parents, or the songs of their poets, or by gazing at the pageantry which was exhibited at their religious mysteries. There was no provision in any heathen country, for making these things the subject of grave discourses, delivered to the common people, by persons for whose character they had a respect.

When this subject came to be canvassed by the philosophers, who rejected the traditions on which the vulgar belief was founded, the doctrine of a future state was first

first doubted of, and then generally disbelieved and discarded. And considering what slender evidence there is for this doctrine on the principles of the light of nature only, it is no wonder that this should have been the consequence of reasoning upon the subject. We shall see that all things have taken the very same turn among modern unbelievers, who have rejected the authority of revelation, which is the great support of the doctrine of a future life in the present age.

All the heathen philosophers, not excepting Socrates himself, speak with great uncertainty concerning a future life. One of the last things he said to his friends, who attended upon him at the time of his death was, “ I am going to die, and you continue in life, but which of us shall be in a better state is known to none but God.” Besides, this philosopher speaks of a future state as the privilege of those only who addict themselves to philosophy, and that the souls of the wicked transmigrate into bodies of ignoble animals ; while the better kind of men, who are not philosophers, inhabit the better kind of animals. Cicero in his philosophical treatises, in which however, he only professes to contend for the

more *probable* opinions, and does not pretend to any certainty, declares in favour of the doctrine of a future life; but in his private letters to his friends he talks in a quite contrary strain, or at least with the greatest possible uncertainty.

The Stoicks did, in general, believe a future life, but it was of such a kind, as to be of little or no use in a moral respect. For they supposed that the souls of men, and of brutes also, having been originally part of the common soul of the universe, would, at length, be absorbed into it again, and consequently that all separate consciousness would be lost.

The *arguments* which are produced by the heathen philosophers in proof of a future life are exceedingly weak. That on which they seem to have laid the greatest stress was derived from the doctrine of *pre-existence*, and Cicero, in his reasoning upon this subject, asserts that the souls of men have existed from all eternity. On this notion is founded the doctrine of the Platonists, that the knowledge we acquire in the present state is only a recollection of what we had been possessed of in a former.

Had the heathen philosophers believed a future life, in the same manner as christians

ans believe in it, they could not have failed to make the same obvious use of it, in strengthening the sanctions of virtue, and supporting them under the troubles of life, and the fears of death. But all the motives to virtue on which they lay any stress are altogether independent of the consideration of a future life, being derived from the intrinsic excellence of virtue, and its complete sufficiency for happiness here, notwithstanding all the pains and troubles of life. Also, though we have many specimens of their *topics of consolation* to their friends in distress, and of their own soliloquies in these circumstances, we find nothing in their writings that approaches to the joyful sentiments of christians. The argument they universally have recourse to is the following. Death cannot be formidable, because it is either a remove for the better, or an utter extinction of being. For it is to be observed, that the philosophers, with one voice, rejected the opinion of *future torments*; so that let a man have been ever so wicked, death, according to them, was the termination of all his sufferings.

Pythagoras, one of the oldest of the Greek philosophers, rejects the notion of future

future punishments, as a vain terror. Plato, sometimes adopts the representations of the poets in this case, and at other times rejects them, as conveying too frightful an idea of a future state. Cicero not only disavows, but even ridicules the doctrine of future punishments, and he represents it as the opinion of all the philosophers, that the Gods are never angry, and that they are incapable of hurting any body.

It must also be observed, upon this subject, that the doctrine of *transmigration*, which was the belief of many heathen nations, conveys no idea of *punishment*, properly so called ; because it was not supposed to have been attended with any consciousness of what had passed in a former state.

The antient Germans had a notion of a future state, and of certain brutal pleasures, to be enjoyed in the palace of Odin ; but they had no respect to moral virtue, as they were supposed to be reserved for those who should die in battle only.

Uncertain and imperfect as were the notions of a future state among the Greeks and Romans, we find little or no remains of them about the time of the promulgation of christianity. In that learned and inquisitive

inquisitive age we have the most undeniable evidence that the belief of a future life was generally rejected both by the philosophers and the vulgar. This was chiefly owing to the pretended *science* of those days ; and the æra of the declension of the traditional opinions at Rome is well known to have been the introduction of the Greek philosophy into that city. Polybius blames the great men of his time for teaching the common people to despise the fables of the poets, representing them as *useful fictions* ; and Cicero speaks of future punishments as what hardly an old woman in his time believed. Bolingbroke says, that the belief of a future state was rejected by many who made pretensions to learning and philosophy, that it was considered as doubtful and uncertain by the rest of them, and that it had been so much blended with fables, that it had but little hold even on the vulgar opinion.

It was the opinion of Bolingbroke himself, that the whole man is dissolved at death ; and though he acknowledges it may be useful to mankind to believe the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, yet he says, it is a fiction, having no real foundation in nature and reason ; and both

he and Mr. Collins, who likewise rejects this doctrine, say, but without any proof, that it was an invention of the Egyptians.

It is usual with many persons, on their first becoming unbelievers, to boast of the sufficiency of the light of nature, with respect to the knowledge of God, the rule of human duty, and the doctrine of a future state; but, if we judge from observation, we shall be led to conclude, either that this was a mere pretence, in order to get rid of revelation, or else, that these unbelievers themselves were not sufficiently aware how much the serious belief of a future life depends upon the belief of revelation, and consequently how much that belief would be shaken when the ground on which it had been built was removed. For after rejecting revelation for some time, they have generally given up the belief which, at first, they professed to have in the moral government of God here or hereafter; and at present there are, I believe, very few unbelievers in revelation, who will pretend to have any serious expectation of a future life. In foreign countries this fact is notorious, and they are therefore generally called *Atheists*. As I have been informed, they call themselves so; and, indeed, when

the

the doctrine of a future life is abandoned, men may almost as well reject the belief of a God also.

Mr. Chubb is a remarkable instance of one who went through all the stages of freethinking and infidelity, speaking at first of a future state with certainty, then with uncertainty, and lastly with absolute unbelief. Upon the supposition of a future life, he says, that those who die in their youth will not be called to judgement, nor those who act a low part in life. In another place he represents it as absolutely doubtful, whether the soul perishes with the body, or subsists after it; and at the same time he declares that, if the soul be perishable with the body, “ there can be “ no place for argument with regard to a “ future state of existence to men, or of a “ future retribution ; because when the “ human frame is once dissolved by death, “ the man ceases to be, and is no more.”

Mr. Hume directly argues against the doctrines of a providence, and a future state of rewards and punishments. Those, says he, are vain reasoners, and invert the order of nature, who, instead of regarding this present life, and the present scene of things, as the sole object of their contem-

plation, render it a passage to something farther ; and yet, he says, that those who attempt to disabuse men of their prejudices in favour of a future state, may, for ought he knows, be good reasoners, but he cannot allow them to be good citizens or politicians ; since they free men from restraint upon their passions, and make the infringement of the laws of equity and society in one respect more easy and secure. Lord Shaftesbury, however, represents the belief and expectation of a future state as unfavourable to real virtue, and of pernicious influence.

I would observe, in this place, that the inference I draw from these observations respecting the moral maxims of unbelievers, is not, by any means, that there are no good moral characters in that class of men. As it is well known that many persons are much *worse*, so there are others, no doubt, much *better* than their principles. The conduct of men is greatly influenced by principles which they do not avow, and the operation of which they do not distinctly perceive ; and also by early habits and dispositions, which act mechanically, and independently on any declared principle. But as far as avowed principles have any effect, and their effect

effect on the minds of those who attend to them must be of *some* moment, and that continually increasing, their real operation, as well as their tendency, must be unfavourable to virtue.

Persons who have had a christian education, may continue to act, in a great measure, upon christian principles, after they become *nominal unbelievers*; especially if a virtuous and decent conduct have become habitual to them, if temptations to act otherwise be not very strong, and if they act without much reflection. But I own that I do not see how I can have the same dependance upon a man's acting a truly virtuous and disinterested part, especially in a case where a considerable risk must be run, with respect to fortune or life, whether he believe a future state or not; especially if he have time to *reflect* on the hazard that he runs with respect to things of the most importance to him. If, however, an unbeliever should sacrifice his fortune, or his life, in a good cause, which I do not say is impossible, it would give me a very high idea of the force of good habits, and mechanical propensities in him, but a proportionably low opinion of his understanding. It would argue such a weakness of

intellect, or such inattention to his known interest, as I should not presume to find in any man. In order to gain my *intire confidence*, I must see a man's reason, his *interest*, and his *passions*, all leading the same way.

But the proper use that I would make of the observations above mentioned, is to shew that we are not to expect either *clearness* or *consistency* of moral principles upon the light of nature; and therefore that, as far as clearness and consistency of such principles are of importance to mankind (and no doubt they must be of great importance) they furnish an evidence of the great *expediency*, if not of the absolute *necessity* of divine revelation, without which so important an advantage was not to be expected.

Whatever we may now think of the *sufficiency of the light of nature*, some of the most intelligent of the heathen philosophers were not insensible of the darkness in which they were involved, and expressed the sense they had of the want of some divine illumination. There are several remarkable expressions of Socrates and Plato to this purpose. Socrates, speaking of the corruption of his times, said that "there was "no hope of amending mens morals, un- "less

“ less God should be pleased to send some other person to instruct them;” and Plato says, that “ whatever is right; and as it should be, in the present evil state of the world, can only be so by the particular interposition of God.” Socrates meeting Alcibiades, as he was going to a temple to pray, endeavoured to convince him that he knew not what to pray for as he ought, till God should dispel the darkness of his mind, and seems to refer to some *instructor*, whom God might send for that purpose.\* To mention no more instances, one of the speakers in the celebrated dialogue of Plato, relating to the last scenes of the life of Socrates, speaking of the uncertainty in which they were, with respect to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, concludes that it is best to follow that opinion which should appear to be the most probable, after their most diligent inquiry; unless they could have a still more sure and certain conduct, to carry them through this life, such as a divine discovery of the truth would be.

The later Platonists and Pythagoreans were so far from thinking divine commu-

\* Clarke's *Evidences of natural and revealed religion*, p. 201, &c.

nlications to be either needless or incredible, that after the promulgation of christianity, they themselves pretended to frequent impulses and inspirations, and had recourse to their initiations, and various magical ceremonies, in order to procure them. It was, moreover, the general opinion of the heathens, that *Orpheus*, and others of their antient poets, wrote by a divine afflatus.

It is also a consideration of great importance, that when the authority of the old *traditional religion* was worn out, something of the same *positive* nature was wanted to supply its place. The *reason* of mankind was by no means sufficient for this purpose. When the passions of men are strongly engaged, and a favourite gratification is in view, reason interposes with little effect; whereas a positive precept, coming from *acknowledged authority*, might have real weight. Besides men are seldom at a loss to find excuses for their favourite indulgences, and they will define *virtue* in such a manner, as to make their own vices either not criminal at all, or to be so in a very slight degree.

We have seen that, in fact, this was the case with the antients, in the most enlightened ages of the world; and it is remarkably

ably the case with modern unbelievers. Nay, though the tendency of some vices, especially those which consist in the irregular indulgence of the senses, is, no doubt, highly injurious, debasing the very souls of men, and laying a foundation for great evils and distresses, both to individuals and society, and this at no great distance ; yet the minds of men are so blinded and infatuated by these vices, that though they may think and act justly in other respects, they cannot, or will not see those consequences, but persist in making plausible apologies for the most flagitious conduct. How desirable then is it, that the wise parent of the human race should interpose and, by his express authority, forbid those practices, which he sees to be ultimately injurious to us.

If we attend but for a moment to the sentiments and conduct of mankind, we shall be convinced that *the ten commandments*, the plain rules of conduct laid down by our Saviour, and the authoritative denunciations of the apostles, are of infinitely more service to the cause of virtue than all that men uninspired of God could ever say, or write upon the subject.

What is the great guardian of sobriety and chastity among us ? Certainly not reason, or philosophy, which has generally made very light of the sanctions of those virtues, but such commands as these, *Thou shalt not commit adultery*, Ex. xx. 14. *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge*. *Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor drunkards, shall inherit the kingdom of God*, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, &c. &c.

A reverence for God is not preserved upon the minds of men by the ideas they naturally have of the awful sanctity of every thing belonging to that great being, who is the maker, preserver, and judge of all, but by such precepts as these, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*, For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain, Ex. xx. 7, the express commands of Christ, *I say unto you swear not at all*; and the advice of the apostle James, *Above all things, my brethren, swear not*.

Even our lives and properties are, in many cases, more effectually secured by the precepts *Thou shalt not commit murder*, *Thou shalt not steal*, and the solemn declaration of the apostle, *Neither thieves, nor covetous*,

*covetous, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God,* than by any sense that men, inflamed by avarice or revenge, can be supposed to have of the *value of life*, and the *natural right* which every man has to it, and to his goods lawfully acquired.

If these observations be just, and I doubt not but that the recital of them will impress upon the minds of all persons, who have a sufficient knowledge of human nature and of the world, a conviction of their truth, divine revelation must have been a matter of great importance, if it had been nothing more than the interposition of a *competent authority*, in favour of those rules of conduct which right reason might have investigated, but which reason, in a variety of circumstances, might also have *evaded*; and it ought ever to be considered, that, in proportion to the real value, usefulness, and consequently desirableness of positive or revealed religion, is its *antecedent credibility*.

Upon the whole, such was the actual state of the heathen world, that it cannot surely be doubted, but that divine revelation was highly *expedient*, and even *necessary*, for the restoration of virtue and happiness.

Without pretty just notions of God, and his moral government ; without a satisfactory knowledge of our duty and future expectations, we should have been little better than brute animals. At least, a man destitute of this knowledge must be incapable of these *exalted sentiments*, and that *dignity of conduct*, which render him an unspeakably greater and happier being. And, since we are naturally capable of these improvements, nothing but a sufficient degree of *knowledge* being requisite to the attainment of them ; the noblest end of human nature seems to be defeated in a state of gross ignorance. It is like fixing a plant in a soil where it cannot find its proper nourishment, and for want of which it can never flourish, so as to be what it was capable of being. For, admitting that it may not be absolutely impossible for the divine being to suffer an intire race of rational creatures, and the most conspicuous inhabitants of such a world as this, to become wholly degenerate and depraved, so as never to answer the important purposes for which they seem to have been made, there certainly can be no impropriety in his interposing to check that depravity, by communicating to them that knowledge, which alone is wanting

ing to effect so great and benevolent a purpose.

Now let us form what idea we please of the *natural powers* of the human mind, it is hardly possible not to be satisfied, from a just view of the state of morals in the heathen world, that it was *morally impossible* they should ever have recovered even that degree of useful religious knowledge, of which they seem to have been formerly possessed, and much less that they would ever have made any important additions to their original stock. In such a state of things, the expectation of some divine interposition must, *a priori*, have been even reasonable, on account of its being so exceedingly seasonable, and advantageous. We may almost say, that *it became* the great and good parent of the human race to afford his creatures and offspring that assistance, which, in their situation, they so much wanted, and which they were not capable of procuring for themselves.

## P A R T    II.

## OBSERVATIONS PREVIOUS TO THE EXAMINATION OF THE PROPER EVIDENCES OF REVELATION.

## S E C T I O N    I.

*Of the nature and use of miracles.*

SOME may think it not suitable to the wisdom of God, to leave his creatures in need of occasional assistance. A being of infinite wisdom, they say, would make his works so perfect at first, as never to want it. But the only reason why it is wise in men to aim at this is, because they cannot always be present with their works, or because it would be troublesome to attend to them. Also, their being present, or not present with their works, is of no consequence to their operation. Whereas God is

is already every where present, and as he constantly supports all the laws of nature, the changing the course of it implies no additional attention or trouble. Besides, it is of the utmost importance to the great ends of the rational creation, that the Almighty maker should be *considered* as present with his works. For any thing that we know, therefore, the best of all schemes may be that in which the divine agency and interposition are never wholly superseded ; and though, as was shewn before, it be wise, and even necessary to establish *general laws*, yet occasional deviations from them may contribute more to promote the same great end than a perfect uniformity.

With respect to *men*, and perhaps all other moral agents, there seems to be an evident propriety in the divine being exciting their attention to his presence and government by occasional *departures* from the laws of nature ; for by this means we more easily preserve a just sense of our connection with and dependance upon God. Whenever any appearances become quite *uniform*, and *constant*, they cease to strike ; insomuch, that it is very possible even for nations of mankind, who have never been taught any thing concerning God, to pass their

their whole lives, in the view of all the wonders of creation, without ever raising their thoughts to the great author of all. Whereas, if the usual connection of causes and effects be interrupted, and things happen contrary to their fullest expectations, founded upon long experience, their attention is immediately roused, and they cannot be satisfied till they understand both the efficient and final cause of so strange an appearance, that is, without knowing both what produced it, and for what reason it was produced. And a little reflection must satisfy them, that he only who ordained, and established the course of nature, can alter it.

Whenever, therefore, the course of nature is interrupted, by the performance of a real miracle, men may be sure that the immediate finger of God is in it; and, therefore, that their attention ought to be excited to it.

Strictly speaking, indeed, it is improper to say that the laws of nature are violated in working of miracles, because they are no more than the effect of an adequate power in nature, exerted at proper seasons. It may be compared to a man's relieving a fly, or any small insect struggling with difficulties

ficulties insurmountable by itself. But this view of miracles by no means affords any objection to the use of them that is here contended for, since whatever demonstrates the interposition of a power *superior to human*, must be referred to the operation of God mediately or immediately, nor is it possible that any system of religion should have a stronger sanction than such works as these.

Some, indeed, have advanced, that there is no natural or necessary connection between *miracles* and *doctrines*. But though this might have been urged very seriously by the antient Jews or Pagans, who believed in magic, we need not scruple to say that, in this age, it must be most egregious trifling, and that it does not deserve any reply. At least it will be time enough to consider this objection, when some person shall be produced, who shall seriously say, that he believes the miracles, but not the doctrines. Spinoza himself, as Mr. Bayle assures us, said to his friends, that “ if he could be “ convinced of the resurrection of Lazarus, “ he would break his whole system in pieces, “ and readily embrace the common faith “ of christians.”

It may also be alledged as an argument for the use of miracles, that the more general is the corruption of religion, and consequently the more necessary revelation is, the less capable men are of perceiving the *internal* proofs of the excellence of a divine religion, and therefore the more occasion they have for *external* proofs, such as miracles afford.

It is possible, that there may be intelligent beings, superior, and invisible to us, and, their powers far exceeding ours, they may exert them in such a manner, as that to us the appearance will be the same as of a divine interposition. But such an abuse of superior powers would be so fatal, that it cannot be supposed that a wise and good being would permit it. Indeed, if this were the case, the divine being would leave himself no certain method of making his own power and designs known to his creatures, whatever occasion there might be for his interposition; as it would not be in their power to guard themselves from artful and malicious beings, who might take pleasure in misleading and confounding them. If ever, therefore, such beings be permitted to work miracles, we may depend upon it that they will be so circumstanced,

stanced, that it will be in the power of men of virtue and good understanding to discover the cheat. Upon the whole, however, it is not in the least degree probable, that any being, besides the supreme, ever worked a real miracle; and, consequently, that all the wonders in which God himself has not been concerned have been the effects of artifice and *deceit*, so as to impose upon none but the ignorant and the credulous; and that men of understanding, who have opportunity of making proper inquiries, may see through and detect them.

SECTION II.

### *Of the nature of the evidence for revelation.*

**N**ATURAL religion being that knowledge of God, of our duty, and future expectations, which we acquire from our observations on the usual course of nature, *revealed religion* may be defined to be the knowledge, relating to the same subjects, which we acquire from *interruptions*

D of

of the usual course of nature, by the interposition of the God of nature, the sole controller of the laws which he himself has established. Now the proper evidence that there has been any such interruption in the usual course of nature, or that any real miracles have been performed, must be the *testimony* of those who had an opportunity of examining the facts, in the same manner as, by our own observation, and that of others together, we acquire knowledge of the laws of nature themselves.

In some respects, however, the evidence of revelation borrows aid from other considerations, independent of human testimony, so as to be perfectly similar to the evidence for natural religion. The proper evidence for natural religion arises from *present appearances*, the doctrines of it being nothing more than the conclusions we draw from them. Could we possibly account for every thing that we see in the world around us without the supposition of an uncaused being, there would have been no foundation for natural religion ; but not being able to account for what we see without supposing the existence and agency of a supreme being, we are under a necessity of admitting that there is such a being, and consequently

consequently of assenting to every other article of natural religion.

In like manner, a variety of *present appearances* may be considered as so many standing evidences of several leading articles in revealed religion ; because, unless we admit that the divine being has interposed in the government of the world, in such a manner as the histories of the Jewish and christian revelations assert, it is impossible to give a satisfactory account of the known state of the world in past and present times ; as, for instance, that such a system as Judaism should have been established, and such a religion as christianity should have had that spread in the world, which all history shews that it had, in such circumstances as the same history informs us both the professors of that religion, and the world in general, then were.

In fact, the evidence from testimony itself is ultimately the same with this, being reduceable to the method of judging from known and even present appearances. For the reason why we are influenced by it, and act upon it, in any particular case, is that, from our knowledge of human nature, we have found that, so circumstanced, it never has deceived us ; so that human

nature must be changed before such testimony could be fallacious. For the same reason, all historical evidence is ultimately an appeal to present appearances. For if things in time past had not been as they represent, the information we now receive concerning them, could not have been conveyed to us.

The argument from *prophecy* is of a mixed nature, resting, in general, upon the testimony of the friends of revelation, that such prophecies were actually delivered a sufficient time before the event, and upon the testimony of general history, and the present state of things, for the accomplishment of them. Many of the scripture prophecies, however, even in the Old Testament, and almost all those of the New, are universally acknowledged to have been published prior to the events to which they correspond.

These three kinds of evidence for the Jewish and christian revelations, viz. from *testimony*, from *present appearances*, and from *prophecy*, I shall consider in the order in which they are here mentioned.

## SECTION III.

*Of the importance of testimony, and the credibility of miracles.*

SINCE one principal evidence of revelation depends upon *human testimony*, I shall first consider the importance of it, and then lay down some general rules for estimating the value of it.

The greatest part of our knowledge has no other foundation than testimony ; and even when the proper foundation is of a different kind, our faith is much strengthened by means of it. For instance, when we ourselves form any rational conclusion from appearances, as that there is a God, we are much confirmed in our belief by finding that many other persons have drawn the same conclusion, either from the same appearances, or from any other.

Besides, the knowledge on which we act every day depends chiefly upon *memory*, or our recollecting and believing that we once saw the evidence of the truths which may

not now be obvious to us. For no person can pretend to be able at all times clearly to demonstrate every proposition to which he gives his firmest assent. Now belief, which depends upon *recollection*, is somewhat similar to that which depends upon *testimony*. In one case we believe that we *ourselves* have seen a thing to be what we now apprehend it to be, and in the other case we believe that *other persons* have seen it to be so.

We ought not, therefore, to think lightly of the nature of faith in revelation, because it is an *historical faith*, and depends upon *human testimony*, for the same is the foundation of the greatest, and most valuable part of human knowledge.

If we appeal to *experience*, to determine the *actual weight* and effect of different kinds of evidence, we shall be convinced that the evidence of testimony is adapted to give as much satisfaction to the mind of man as any other kind of evidence. No person, I believe, who has read history, has any more doubt of there being such a city as Rome, of there having been such a person as Julius Cæsar, or of his having been killed there, than he has of the truth of the proposition that 2 and 2 make

4. At least, if there be any difference in the *fullness of persuasion* in these two cases, it is altogether imperceptible; and any person would, in fact, venture as much upon the truth of the one, as upon that of the other.

Though it be true, indeed, in theory, that there is some small degree of uncertainty in every single testimony, which can never be wholly removed by any subsequent testimony (since this, also, must be liable to the same kind of uncertainty) yet there is also a degree of uncertainty, and a source of mistake, in drawing conclusions from self evident truths, and especially when the chain of deduction is of considerable length.

Considering the great weight which testimony naturally has with mankind, we cannot but conclude that any thing may be proved by it, except such things as are contradicted by superior evidence, and such is, certainly, that of our own senses, comprehending not only our immediate perceptions, but even necessary conclusions from those perceptions. How incredible, therefore, soever, any fact may be *a priori*; since, if it be not absolutely impossible, it may be true, so also a certain degree of

historical evidence must be sufficient to prove the truth of it.

We judge of other persons, and of the connection between their sentiments, language and conduct by ourselves ; and knowing, by our own consciousness, that a *regard to truth* is a natural, and very strong principle in the human mind, we take it for granted that the solemn declarations of others are founded in truth ; and the general experience of *human veracity* confirms our disposition to give credit to human testimony, unless we can discover some reason for supposing that those who give us any information were either deceived themselves, or were much interested in deceiving others.

Mr. Hume, indeed, has advanced, that we ought not to listen to any evidence in favour of *miracles*, or of there ever having been a departure from the laws of nature, because every such evidence is contradicting by our own constant experience, of the absolute uniformity of the laws of nature.

But, with respect to past facts, this is taking for granted the very thing to be proved, because it is asserted by the friends of revelation, that the course of nature has not always proceeded without interruption, but

but that, for great and good purposes, the divine author of it has not confined himself to it, but has occasionally departed from it. In reality, therefore, all that Mr. Hume has advanced, with respect to this case, is that there have been no miraculous events because there have been none. At least, it is judging from the experience of one age, against the express testimony of former ages, and in a case in which there is no contradiction between them ; since both may be equally true. For the course of nature may be perfectly uniform now, and yet may not have been so, in all cases, formerly.

But let us suppose that we lived in the age in which the first miracle was said to be performed, and that there was no pretended evidence of any thing like it having happened before. In this case our constant experience of any course of events can only be a foundation for a *reasonable, or a certain degree of, expectation*, that the same course will be continued, and by no means amounts to any thing like a demonstration that the same course will always be continued. The usual operations of nature, we have seen, are only different modes of the divine agency ; but though the divine

being has thought proper to act in a perfectly uniform manner, during any given period of time, it cannot follow from thence, that there never can be a reason for his changing that mode of operation ; unless our reasoning concerning him and his agency be quite different from our reasoning concerning other intelligent beings and their agency ; and in this case there can be no foundation for such a difference.

Besides, if there be a God, and if the world, in its present state, have not been eternal, there must have been a time when the divine being did properly *interpose*, so as to form both it, and the plants and animals which are peculiar to it ; and if there *has been* but one proper interposition in any period of time past, there *may*, according to Mr. Hume's own method of reasoning, be another.

It would also follow from Mr. Hume's principles, that every *new fact* in philosophy must be absolutely incredible, till we can see how it arises from principles, the operation of which we have seen in other cases ; and so the king of Siam will be justified in giving no credit to the Dutchmen, who informed him that, in their country, water became sometimes so hard, that

that it would even bear men and carriages; for, living in an uniformly warm climate, he had never seen any such thing, and could not conceive that it was possible.

The evidence that the course of nature has been departed from, is the very same with that by which we judge when it is not departed from, and must be equally competent in both cases. For certainly the eyes, ears, and other senses of men are equally capable of judging concerning all things which they are equally capable of perceiving. If a number of persons could distinguish their friend from all other men before he died, they must, being possessed of the same organs, be equally capable of distinguishing him from all other persons after he should be risen from the dead. And whatever Mr. Hume or any other person may pretend concerning the *natural incredibility* of all accounts of miracles, I doubt not but that such testimony as this would have its weight even with themselves.

Nothing can be naturally more improbable than the case I have mentioned, of a person rising from the dead; and yet I do not believe that any person can be so incredulous, but that, if only half a dozen persons, of his own previous nomination,

should seriously report, that, having perfectly known a person who was said to be risen from the dead, and having conversed with and examined him, they were satisfied he was no impostor, but the very same person with whom they had been acquainted before, he would believe them ; so that his own real feelings would be such a demonstration of the *actual power of testimony*, as none of his sophistry could evade. Now it will be shewn, that the evidence of the resurrection of Christ is even much more satisfactory than this ; the witnesses of it being, in reality, more unexceptionable, than such as any person would have previously nominated for the purpose.

It is readily acknowledged, that many propositions are, in their own nature, absurd, and therefore that no evidence whatever can be of any avail to the proof of them. If, for instance, a person should do what I should not be able to distinguish from a real miracle, pretending to prove by it that the sun did not rise yesterday, to contradict such a notorious historical fact as there is such a place as Rome, or to refute so plain a proposition as this, that 2 and 2 make 4, he will not perswade me to admit any thing so contrary to experience, to common

mon sense, or to unquestionable human testimony.

Also, the great outlines of natural religion; respecting the providence, and goodness of God, and the great rules of human duty, though they be not, strict speaking, demonstrable, yet their very high degree of probability, and their great importance to mankind, give them such a sanction, that we ought not to listen to any evidence that would tend to undermine them. We may take it for granted that God cannot contradict himself. Whatever, therefore, he clearly appears to be in his works, we may assure ourselves that he will also appear to be in any revelation that he shall please to make of himself. He cannot appear good and merciful in one method of making himself known, and cruel and unjust in another. Nothing, therefore, can be admitted as contained in any revelation, that is pretended to come from God, which is contrary to the plain principles of natural religion already demonstrated.

Since, however, there appear to be many *difficulties* on the subject of natural religion, and many of our conclusions have only a small degree of probability in their favour, we must by no means take it for granted that

that such conclusions are always just, but must expect that a revelation from God will discover many mistakes, and especially that it will supply many defects, in the best formed system of natural religion.

From the observations which have now been made, it may be seen, that we ought to be very far from relinquishing our reason, when we come to consider the subject of revelation. On the contrary, then it is that we ought to make the most use of it, to see that we be not imposed upon in a matter of so much consequence to us. It is only by the help of that faculty which we call *reason*, that we can distinguish between any two systems of religion that may be proposed to us. It is by reason only that we can judge both of their previous probability, and also of the positive evidence that is produced in favour of them. Let us, therefore, upon all occasions, call to our aid that power which God has given us to be the guide of life, and especially in matters of so great importance to us as those certainly are which relate to the will of God, what he requires of us, and what we have to expect from him.

## SECTION.

## SECTION IV.

*Rules for estimating the value of human testimony.*

THE plain rules for estimating the value of *single evidences* are the two following. Any thing, capable of being proved by mere testimony, is credible in proportion to the opportunity the witness had of being well informed concerning it himself, and his freedom from any bias, that might make him wish to impose upon others. If the person who gives us information concerning any transaction, at which we ourselves were not present, appear to be a competent judge of it, and have been in a situation in which he had the best opportunity of being rightly informed, and if there be no appearance of its being his interest to deceive us, we give our assent; but we hesitate, in proportion to the doubts we entertain on either of these heads.

The *more* persons there are who relate the same transaction, of which they are equally credible witnesses, the stronger is the evidence for it. But the more persons there are through whose hands the *same narration* is conveyed to us, the weaker is the evidence. In this latter case, the witnesses are called *dependent* ones; but in the former they are said to be *independent*. Whatever imperfection there may be in any one of a number of independent witnesses, it is in part removed by the testimony of others; but every imperfection in the original evidence is increased in proportion to the number of dependent witnesses, through whose hands the same story is transmitted.

The marks of a story being related by a number of independent witnesses, of full credit, is their agreement in the principal articles, and their disagreement with respect to things of less consequence, or at least a variety, or diversity in their manner of relating the same story.

The reason of this is, that to things of principal importance they will all equally attend, and therefore they will have their minds equally impressed with the ideas of them; but that to things of less consequence they will not give the same attention,

tion, and therefore they will be apt to conceive differently concerning them.

If a number of persons agree very minutely with respect to all the facts of any narrative, general and particular, and also in the order and manner of the narration, it will amount to a proof that they have agreed together to tell the same story ; and in this they will be supposed to have been influenced by some motive not favourable to the value of their testimony ; and besides, having learned circumstances one of another, they cannot be considered as independent of one another. All histories which have been written by different persons, in all respects equally credible, agree in the main things, but they are as certainly found to differ with respect to things of less consequence.

We likewise distinguish with respect to the *nature of the fact* to which our assent is required, for we expect more numerous, more express, and in all respects, more unexceptionable evidence, according to the degree of its previous improbability, arising from its want of analogy to other facts already known ; and in this there is a *gradation*, from things which are antecedently highly probable, and therefore require but little

little positive evidence, to things which are utterly incredible, being so contrary to what we already know of the course of nature, and the author of it, that no evidence could convince us of it.

If my servant should tell me that, as he was passing through a certain place, he saw a friend of mine, who I knew had business in that neighbourhood, and the character of my servant was such that I had never known him to tell me a wanton lie, I should readily believe him ; and if I had any thing to do in the case, I should, without hesitation, act upon the supposition that what he told me was true. But if the same servant should say that, coming through the same place, he saw another of my friends whom I knew to have been dead, I should not believe him, though the thing in itself was not naturally impossible ; and if ten or a dozen persons of our common acquaintance, persons of knowledge and curiosity, should, independently of one another, seriously inform me that they were present themselves, and had no doubt of the fact, I might believe it.

It follows, however, from this observation, that miracles require a much stronger testimony than common facts. The latter are

are analogous to such other facts as are the subject of every days experience, so that we are continually expecting such things, and they are never any surprize to us ; whereas the former are contrary to that analogy, and are therefore unexpected.

By the help of these maxims I shall now proceed to examine the evidence of the Jewish and christian revelations, shewing how far they are in themselves credible or incredible upon the whole ; then examining the evidence which has been produced in their favour, and lastly considering some particular objections which have been made to them.

## S E C T I O N V.

*Of the antecedent credibility of the Jewish and Christian revelations.*

THE belief of the Jewish and christian revelations, which have so close a connection that they must stand or fall together, is to believe that the divine being has, from time to time, interposed in

the

the moral government of the world ; having, upon several important occasions, spoken to mankind by persons called *prophets*, in order to give them information concerning various truths, of the greatest moment to them, and to reclaim them from vice and wickedness ; and that many persons have wrought incontestible miracles in proof of their having received a commission from God for this purpose.

In the history of the Jewish religion we are informed that the divine being made choice of one particular nation, the posterity of Abraham by Isaac and Jacob, as the principal medium of his communications to mankind ; making especial provision against their falling into idolatry, and making their temporal prosperity manifestly to depend upon their adherence to his worship.

In the history of the christian religion, we are informed that, after many predictions, which did, in fact, raise the expectation of the Jewish people, and, in some measure, also, that of the rest of mankind, concerning a very extraordinary person, who should be in a more eminent manner distinguished by God, for the benefit of men, *Jesus Christ*, (whose character and history strictly corresponded to those prophetic

phetic descriptions) was born in Judea, that he received from God a power of working miracles, in a more illustrious manner than any other prophet who had gone before him, that he inculcated the great duties of natural religion in their full extent, with the express promise of a resurrection from the dead, and an everlasting life of happiness, to all who should believe and obey his doctrine; and that, after living an irreproachable and most useful life (being a perfect pattern of the most genuine piety and benevolence, and of a proper moderation without austerity, with respect to all the things of this life) he was put to death by the Jews and Romans; but that he rose again from the dead on the third day, as he himself had foretold that he should; and that he ascended to heaven in a visible manner.

We are also informed, in the same history, that after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, persons appointed by him, with the title of *apostles*, and many others of his disciples, had the power of working miracles in his name; that, at the risk of every thing that was valuable to them in this life, and of life itself, they preached the gospel; publishing in all places the history of Jesus Christ (the same that is

con-

contained in the books called gospels) as what they could attest upon their own knowledge ; particularly reciting his doctrines, precepts, and promises ; and assuring all men, that he would come again, with a commission from God to judge the whole race of mankind, according to their works ; when he would most amply reward all the virtuous and good, especially those who had been sufferers in the cause of righteousness and truth, and that he would inflict an adequate punishment on all the wicked.

Lastly, if these histories be true, a very great number both of Jews and Gentiles were, in consequence of this preaching of the gospel, converted to the belief of christianity, many of them suffered long and severe persecution on this account, and even courageously died martyrs to their faith, and christianity kept continually gaining ground in the world, as Jesu Christ had foretold.

This is a general idea of what is contained in the Jewish and christian revelations, all the particulars being found in the *bible*, which is a collection of such books as contain the most authentic account of those revelations ; being written, as is pretended, by men who themselves had received communications

munications from God, and who were witnesses of the most important of those transactions of which they give an account.

Now, before we examine the evidence on which our belief of the particulars which I have now recited rests, it is proper to consider how far the account is in itself *credible*; by which I now mean, whether it be capable of being proved at all; and, if it be, what kind of evidence is necessary to procure to it the assent of reasonable and thinking men.

That such a revelation, and miracles in proof of it, are *possible*, cannot, I think, be disputed, since the same being who made the world, must necessarily have it in his power to interpose in the government of it; and not only to reverse the laws of it, but even to destroy it, if he should think proper. The only question, therefore, is whether there could be a *sufficient reason* for such an interposition as has been described. But since *goodness* has been shewn to be the characteristic of the divine being, such a revelation must, *a priori*, appear credible, in proportion to its being useful and reasonable. If the state of things before revelation was such as made it highly expedient, at that particular juncture, in exact proportion

proportion to that *expediency*, it might even have been expected; and it would have been expected with absolute certainty, by any being who was a proper judge of the real value and seasonableness of it.

Now that such a revelation was in fact highly expedient, has been sufficiently shewn already, in the view which has been given of the state of the heathen world antecedent to it; for without it mankind were actually involved in the grossest ignorance concerning their maker, and also concerning many important moral duties, and the sanctions of virtue in a future life; and, in consequence of this, they were abandoning themselves more and more to the most destructive vices.

That God should suffer his offspring of mankind to fall into so deplorable a situation is only one branch of the complaint concerning the introduction and prevalence of *evils* in general; and so long as goodness appears, upon the whole, to be the governing principle of the divine being, they should lead us to look for, and expect with confidence, a remedy for these and all other evils; and we may assure ourselves that such a remedy will be provided, as soon as ever these evils shall have answered the benevolent

benevolent intention of him who has appointed, or permitted them.

So far, therefore, was such a revelation as I have been describing from being incredible, *a priori*; that, since it has been proved to have been highly *desirable*, those of mankind who had a just idea of their situation, and of the character of the supreme being, might have been led to expect, or at least to wish for some extraordinary interposition, to save a sinking world, to restore the knowledge and worship of the one true God, and to provide more effectual sanctions of virtue.

E

PART

## P A R T III.

THE EVIDENCES OF THE JEWISH AND  
CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS, DERIVED FROM  
TESTIMONY, AND ESPECIALLY THAT  
OF ITS FRIENDS.

## S E C T I O N I.

*Of the authenticity of the books of scripture.*

SUCH revelations as the Jewish and Christian being highly probable, or not unlikely to be true, what we have to do, in order to ascertain their *proper credibility*, is to consider whether the accounts of miracles, said to have been wrought in attestation of them, may be depended upon. In other words, we are to inquire whether the books which we usually call the *scriptures* contain a faithful history of facts. For, if what we there read be true, the

the divine being has unquestionably interposed in the government of the world, and many persons, in proof of it, have worked the most undeniable miracles ; having performed such things as no men could have done, except they were authorized and impowered by him who appointed the laws of nature, and who alone can suspend or contrall them.

Now it may be shewn that, according to all the rules of judging concerning the value of testimony, we must admit the truths of these histories, if the books themselves be *genuine*, that is, if they were written by the persons whose names they bear, or in the circumstances in which the contents of them represent them to have been written ; if, for instance, the books of Moses were written by Moses, or, which is the same thing with respect to their credibility, if they were written by any person who copied from, or digested what he had written, though they might add some circumstances of later date ; or indeed if the chief of their contents were written by any person who was cotemporary with Moses. The book of Joshua will also be genuine, if it was either written by Joshua himself, by any of his cotemporaries, or by any person who

lived within a sufficient time after his death, so as not to be unacquainted with the transactions of which he gives an account. The same observation may be made concerning all the remaining books of the Old Testament, and likewise those of the New ; because such persons as the apostles, or their cotemporaries, were (as will be shewn at large) in circumstances, in which they could not possibly have been imposed upon themselves, and also in which we cannot reasonably suppose they could be under the influence of any sufficient motive to attempt to impose upon others.

Now, that the books of scripture are genuine, we have, in all respects, the same reason to believe, as we have to receive any other antient writings as genuine ; as that the books of Homer, for instance, were written by Homer, those of Thucydides by Thucydides, those by Tacitus by Tacitus, or any other of the most celebrated antient writings, by their reputed authors, or their cotemporaries. In all these cases, the proof is simply this, that such writings have been quoted and referred to, as the works of their reputed authors, or their cotemporaries, by subsequent writers, without any considerable variation, to the present

sent time. Nay we have much stronger evidence for the authenticity of the most important of the books of scripture, than we have for that of any other writings in the world ; because they are much oftener quoted, and referred to, in every age, from the very times in which they were written, quite down to the present ; which has been owing to nothing but the very great credit they have gained, in consequence of their being considered as of the greatest importance to mankind.

Indeed, so convincing has been the evidence of the authenticity of the books of scripture, that it has been almost universally allowed, by those who have hated and opposed the system of religion which they contain. Neither the Jews, for instance, nor any early writer among the heathens, who undertook to controvert the principles of christianity, ever intimated that they had so much as a doubt concerning the genuineness of the books which contain an account of it. The *four gospels* are particularly mentioned by Julian, and a very considerable part of the contents of them are quoted by Celsus. Accordingly, these, and other early opposers of christianity, admit the truth of the history in general, without

excepting what is miraculous in it ; ascribing these wonderful works either to the agency of some evil spirit, or endeavouring to account for them in some other manner, in which the interposition of the divine being, in favour of Christ and the apostles, might not be necessary.

It affords an argument exceedingly favourable to the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, that they were very soon translated into various foreign languages, and that a multiplicity of copies, both of the originals and of these translations, were likewise presently dispersed into all parts of the known world, which at that time abounded with men of reading and curiosity ; and that all our present copies, both of the originals and of these translations, agree with one another, and with the quotations made by antient writers from them, in every thing material. We have, therefore, all the reason in the world to conclude that these books have not been materially corrupted, notwithstanding the various readings, and other errors of small consequence, by which all antient writings have suffered in the same proportion ; and which were, indeed, unavoidable, unless every particular transcriber had been prevented,

vented, by a miracle, from making any mistake, which was by no means necessary for any valuable purpose.

It is only upon the *leading facts* in the gospel history that the truth of christianity is founded; so that if the books of the New Testament come to us in such a state, as to contain a sufficiently credible account of the miracles which Christ wrought, of the doctrines he taught, of his death, and resurrection from the dead, and also of the miracles and preaching of the apostles, and the manner in which their doctrine was received by the Jews and Gentiles, at the first promulgation of it, they are quite sufficient to induce us to live and die as becomes christians, having a full assurance of a future judgment, and of a state of retribution after death. And no corruption of the books of scripture, designed or undesigned, can be supposed to have vitiated them so much, as not to have left them even far more perfect than this great purpose and use of them requires.

It is also to be observed, that the controversies in which christians began to be engaged, even before the publication of the books of the New Testament, and especially about that time, and from thence to the pre-

sent day, are of great moment to establish their authenticity; since the writers in all those controversies constantly appealed to, and expressly quoted the books of scripture; and in all the writings which are come down to us we find the texts they quoted, in every thing material, the same as in our present copies, so that we may depend upon it, that the principal books of the New Testament are the genuine productions of the persons, and of the age to which they are usually ascribed. And from this it will be made to appear, that they supply a sufficient evidence of the facts on which the christian history is founded.

The particular testimonies of antient writers Christian, Jewish and Heathen, which demonstrate the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, have been produced at full length by Dr. Lardner, and as it would be too tedious to recite such particulars in this place, I must refer my readers to his most valuable work, intitled *The Credibility of the gospel history*. They may assure themselves, however, that, notwithstanding the authenticity of some of the books has been questioned, there never was any doubt with respect to any of them, except to the epistles of James, and Jude,

the

the second of Peter, the two small epistles of John, that which is inscribed to the Hebrews, and the book of Revelation. The authority of the four gospels, the book of Acts, and the rest of the epistles, was never called in question. It is true, indeed, that some of the Judaizing christians, having conceived an aversion to St. Paul, had no opinion of his writings, but they were never denied to be his. Also some of the early christians rejected the genealogy of Christ, and the history of the miraculous conception, as related in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, but they do not appear to have been numerous, nor was their opinion of long continuance.

Besides, we are by no means to infer, that because some early christians rejected any particular *opinion* or *fact* contained in any of the four Evangelists, they did not therefore think them to be the genuine writings of the persons whose names they bear. For though they were satisfied that they wrote those things, they might think them to be *so far* mistaken. We find, in the history of the Acts, that the opinion of a single apostle did not always pass uncontroverted; and with respect to any thing except the

leading facts, such as were mentioned above, and which have never yet been questioned by any persons who call themselves christians, any difference of opinion among the apostles, or others, is of no moment whatever, with respect to the proper evidence of christianity.

With respect, however, to all those books of the New Testament, the authenticity of which has been questioned, the arguments in favour of them are considerably stronger than those against them. It is not certain who was the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, but if it was not written by St. Paul, which seems to be the more probable opinion, yet it was certainly written in the apostolical age, and by some person of authority in the christian church. The gospel of Matthew was, perhaps, written in Hebrew, for the benefit of Jewish converts ; but either Matthew himself, or some other person of the same age must have translated it into Greek, the language in which we now have it ; so that, with respect to every thing of importance, it is of the same value as the original Hebrew would have been. The book of *Revelation* was not received in all christian churches for some time ; but afterwards it gained universal

versal credit, and its authority is now justly considered as of the highest rank. The reasons for which it was disregarded by some are, indeed, sufficiently obvious, and appear to be of no manner of weight, as they arose chiefly from the doctrine of the *millenium*, of which some antient hereticks were thought to avail themselves too much.

There can be no doubt but that the canon of the Old Testament was the same in the time of our Saviour as it is now; nor could it have been corrupted materially after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, on account of the sect of the Samaritans, which took its rise about that time. For these people professed the same regard to the sacred books with the Jews themselves, and were always at variance with them about the interpretation of the scriptures. The Samaritan copy of the Pentatuch is now in our hands, and, excepting some *numbers*, in which the different copies and translations of all antient writings are peculiarly subject to vary, and a single text, in which mount *Gerizim* and mount *Ebal* are interchanged, it is the very same with the Jewish copy. Not long after this, the books of the Old Testament, beginning with the Pentatuch, were trans-

lated into Greek, and dispersed, by means of the Jews, into almost every part of the known world.

There is not the least probability that any change, worth any man's attempting to make, or in the least affecting any principal point of the Jewish religion, was made during their captivity; which, however, was not so long, reckoning from the time of the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar, but that many of those who returned from it had a perfect remembrance of the temple of Solomon, which had been burned in the siege by Nebuchadnezzar; for they wept when they saw how much the new temple was inferior to it; and can it be supposed but that some of these people would have taken the alarm, and a schism have been occasioned, if any material change had been attempted to be made in the constitution of the law, or the contents of the sacred books.

Least of all can it be supposed that Ezra would, at that particular time, have introduced the injunction on which he laid so much stress, about putting away all their strange wives. In his circumstances this measure must have appeared exceedingly hazardous, considering how many persons even

even among the priests themselves, had contracted such marriages, how considerable they were by their birth and alliances, and consequently how many enemies the Jews would thereby make themselves. We find, in fact, that this measure did meet with the most violent opposition, produced a lasting division among themselves, and made them incur the hatred and ill offices of all their neighbours. Besides, since many of the priests, who must have known as much of the law of Moses as Ezra himself, were highly exasperated at this proceeding, they would never have suffered him to publish that as one of the laws of Moses, which they knew to be a mere forgery.

If we go farther back into the Jewish history, we shall still be unable to pitch upon any time in which any material change in the sacred books could have been attempted, with the least prospect of success. It was one of the most earnest instructions of Moses himself, that the book of the law, a copy of which was lodged in the ark, should be the subject of constant reading and meditation in every Israelitish family; and it was expressly appointed that it should be read publickly every seven years, at the feast

feast of Tabernacles. Deut. xxxi. 9, 13. and the Levites, who were dispersed through all the twelve tribes, were particularly appointed to study and to explain it to the rest of the nation; and, notwithstanding the times of defection and idolatry, they were never entirely without prophets, and even many thousands of others, who continued firm in the worship of the true God, and therefore must have retained their regard to the sacred books of the Law.

As to the alarm of king Josiah and his court, on finding a copy of the Law in the temple, it may be accounted for many ways better than upon the supposition of that being the first copy of all, either imposed upon the king, or imposed by him upon the people; neither of which could possibly have been effected. It is not improbable, but that this particular copy might have been the original one, which had been taken out of the ark, and mislaid, in some former idolatrous reign; and the passages which they read might contain some aweful denunciations against idolatry, to which they had given but little attention before. Whatever we may conjecture with respect to this particular fact, it can never be thought in the least probable, that a nation so prone to idolatry

idolatry as the Israelites were, from the time of their settlement in the land of Canaan to the Babylonish captivity, should either forge, or not detect and expose the forgery of books pretending to so high authority, and so hostile to their favourite propensity.

Upon the whole, the Jews have, no doubt, acted the part of most faithful and even scrupulous guardians of their sacred books, for the use of all the world in the times of christianity. After the last of their prophets, Malachi, they admitted no more books into their canon, so as to permit them to be read in their synagogues, though they were written by the most eminent men in their nation ; it being a maxim with them, that no book could be intitled to a place in the canon of their scriptures, unless it was written by a prophet, or a person who had had communication with God.

That the scriptures of the Old Testament have not been materially corrupted by the Jews since the promulgation of christianity, notwithstanding it is thought that, out of enmity to christianity, they attempted it in a few passages (though it was more with respect to the Septuagint Greek than the original Hebrew) is evident

dent from the many prophecies still remaining in their scriptures, concerning the humiliation and sufferings of the Messiah, in which the christians always triumphed when they disputed with the Jews. These passages, therefore, we may assure ourselves, would have been the first that the Jews would have practised upon, if it had been in their power, or in their inclination to do it.

All the books of scripture have also many internal marks of their being the genuine production of the ages in which they are said to have been written, as they contain so many allusions to particular persons, places, opinions, and customs, which are known, from other allowed histories, to have existed in those times ; and the historical incidents which the sacred writers occasionally mention, are sufficiently agreeable to other authentic accounts ; the variations being no greater than such as are to be found in other genuine histories of the same period. This branch of the evidence of christianity has also been particularly illustrated by Dr. Lardner.

## SECTION II.

*Of the evidence from testimony in favour of  
the christian revelation.*

TAKING it for granted that the books of scripture are the genuine productions of the persons and times to which they are usually ascribed, I shall proceed to consider the value of the evidence which they contain, for those facts, on which the truth of the Jewish and christian religions depends, beginning with the latter.

We find in the books of the New Testament, and especially the four *Evangelists*, and the book of *A&ts*, not only that twelve persons who are called *apostles*, but that thousands of others were witnesses of a continued course of miracles performed by Jesus Christ, during the whole course of his ministry ; especially that he was actually put to death, and that great numbers of persons had the most satisfactory evidence that he rose again from the dead, as he himself had foretold.

foretold. These were persons who had attended upon him constantly, and had had the fairest opportunity of inquiring into the truth of the facts. Many of these witnesses of the miracles of Christ were *strangers*, and others were his most inveterate *enemies*; who, notwithstanding this, could not deny but that he performed many real miracles, though they ascribed some of them to the agency of evil spirits.

The miracles of Christ were of so great notoriety, that Peter, addressing himself to the body of the Jews at Jerusalem, within a short time after the resurrection, had no occasion to produce any particular witnesses of them; but, without being contradicted by any person, appealed to the whole body of the people present, as having already the fullest conviction concerning them. *Acts ii, 22.* St. Paul, also, when he had an audience of King Agrippa, appealed to his own knowledge and conviction; saying that the things were *not done in a corner*, *Acts xxvi, 26.*

Even the friends and disciples of Christ were only those who were made so by the evidence of his miracles, and his excellent doctrine, and who must have come to him with strong prejudices, against his being the

the person that he pretended to be, and against his being possessed of those extraordinary powers which they saw him exert. Had he even performed all that they expected from the Messiah, the obscurity of his birth, and his passing for a Galilean, were sufficient, we find, to make many persons conclude, without farther inquiry, that he must be an impostor. All the Jews, however, even the most intelligent, and the most virtuous of them, expected nothing less than a temporal prince, who should assert the freedom of the Jews, and the empire of the world. Nothing, therefore, but the strongest evidence of his having a divine commission can be supposed to have induced them to receive him in that character, after he had peremptorily declined all kingly honours, and especially after his sufferings and death.

When Christ was actually put to death, we see that his most intimate companions forsook him and fled; and considering the damp which was thrown upon all the views and expectations of the apostles by the ignominious death of their master, their re-assembling so soon afterwards, and undertaking, in the face of the greatest opposition, to preach the doctrine of their master, and

and gain converts to the belief of his divine mission, cannot be accounted for, but upon the supposition of their having received the fullest conviction that he rose from the dead, and had authorized them to preach in his name.

So incredulous were the disciples of Christ with respect to the truth of his resurrection, though it was what he himself had expressly foretold, that Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, declared, even after he was informed of it by the rest (who assured him that they themselves had lately seen, and conversed with him) that he could not believe the fact, unless he should actually handle and examine his wounds, and yet even this man did afterwards receive the fullest satisfaction.

That so many of the Jewish nation should have been converted to Christianity by the preaching of the apostles, is such a fact, as cannot be accounted for, but upon the supposition of their having received the most satisfactory evidence with respect to the resurrection of Christ, and the power with which the apostles were invested to work miracles in his name.

The whole nation of the Jews are to this day, and, according to all the accounts that

that we have of them, they ever have been the most obstinate and incredulous of all mankind, and therefore the last people in the world to convince or persuade; and they must have been more especially so in such a case as this, where their most favourite prejudices were directly opposed. They must, therefore, have been the least liable to have been imposed upon, and the most unexceptionable witnesses that can be thought of for this purpose.

No reasonable motive can be assigned for the astonishing *perseverance* of the apostles, and other primitive christians, in preaching the gospel, bearing all hardships, and even undergoing death for the sake of it, but the most firm persuasion of their having a reward in heaven; and how could they have come by that firm persuasion, but in consequence of having received the clearest evidence of miracles, in favour of the pretensions and power of Christ.

That a few persons might have had their heads turned, and have acted in an absurd and unaccountable manner, may be supposed; but unless human nature was constituted in a manner quite different from what we see and experience at present (which would be much more extraordinary than

than any thing that the scheme of revelation requires us to believe) it can never be supposed that *so many* persons as actually incurred reproach and persecution, even unto death, for the sake of the gospel, at the first promulgation of it, should, all of them, for so long a course of time, have been so infatuated, as to risk and abandon every thing, without a well grounded hope of a sufficient recompence ; that is, without a rational conviction concerning the resurrection and power of Christ.

Besides, they all of them pretended to some *miraculous gift*, and cannot be supposed to have continued to act the part which they did through life, without a consciousness of their having, and exerting such miraculous powers on proper occasions.

If the heads of the apostles and other primitive christians had been turned by the most preposterous ambition, and they had meant nothing farther than to make themselves conspicuous in the world, it can hardly be supposed but that some of them, at least, would have thought of setting up for themselves, and that the ablest among them would have endeavoured to make tools of the rest. On the contrary, there is not the least appearance of any one of them endeavouring

deavouring to assume authority over the rest; but they persist through life, as brothers and fellow labourers, in their allegiance to their crucified Lord, referring all their mighty works to his power and spirit. With this humility and perfect harmony they preached the religion of their master, not only when they were together, but when they were separated from one another, in very distant countries; where, if what they performed were mere *tricks of their own*, they had an opportunity of establishing themselves independently of one another. Even the apostle Paul, who preached the gospel without conferring with any of the other apostles, pursued the same conduct, engaging in the very same persecuted interest, and promoting it by the very same methods.

This unambitious conduct of the apostles is the more remarkable, as before the crucifixion of Christ, some of them appeared to be of a different character, eagerly aspiring after worldly honours, and ambitious of preeminence over their brethren. This, and other remarkable changes in their disposition and conduct after the death of Christ, and especially their suddenly taking courage to preach the gospel in the face of the greatest dangers, immediately after

after their cowardly disfertion of their master, and after a catastrophe which intirely overturned all their fond hopes and expectations from him, are easily accounted for on the hypothesis of their having been *endued with power from on high*, on the day of Pentecost, but are inexplicable, on the known principles of human nature, without such an hypothesis.

Christians, even in the times of the apostles, were divided into various sects and parties, and the contention was carried on with great heat and animosity among them, some of them opposing the apostles themselves. Now had any of them been but suspected of contriving or conniving at a fraud, with respect to the foundation of the religion they professed, it could not, in those circumstances, but have been detected and exposed. Yet in arguing with these divided christians the apostle Paul scruples not to appeal to miracles wrought among them, and even by them, and gives particular directions about the most proper use of the supernatural gifts of which they were possessed. In these circumstances how could he have written in this manner, if he had been sensible that no such miracles had

been

been wrought, and no such supernatural gifts possessed either by himself or them.

That the apostles and primitive christians could not expect to make any lasting advantage of their imposture, admitting that their ruling passion was the ambition of being the founders of a new religion, may be argued from this consideration, that for some time they universally expected the second coming of Christ, to put an end to the world, in that very generation.

If Christ and his apostles were not the weakest of all enthusiasts, which their whole conduct shews them not to have been, they could not but know whether they were inspired of God, and had a power of speaking and acting in his name, or not. Now that men of virtue should pretend to act from God, at the same time that they knew that they had no such commission, cannot be supposed. It follows, therefore, that, not being gross and weak enthusiasts, they could not be under an illusion themselves; and being good men, friends of virtue, and shewing the most genuine marks of an unfeigned reverence for God, and for truth, they would not attempt to impose upon others.

That the apostles were men possessed of the greatest cunning, so as to conduct, with ability and success, all the parts of so complex an imposture, and which required so many agents, of ability equal to their own, and that at the same time they were dupes to the grossest illusions, are contradictory suppositions. To a certain degree, indeed, there may be a mixture of artifice and enthusiasm ; and therefore men may be deceived themselves, and endeavour to deceive others. But the *degree* in which it is necessary, for the purpose of infidelity, that these two opposite qualities should be found in Christ and his apostles, and in all those who must necessarily have been in the same scheme, is absolutely impossible, while human nature is what it is ; and no example of any thing approaching to it can be found in the history of mankind.

Most of the preceding arguments are peculiarly strong with respect to St. Paul. He had been an inveterate enemy, and persecutor of the Christians, a man of great ability, learning, activity, and influence with the leading men of his country ; so that he had every thing in this world to expect from his opposition to christianity, and nothing but persecution, ignominy, or almost

almost certain death from embarking in that cause. Yet, notwithstanding this, he suddenly, and without discovering any marks of insanity, or giving any instance of absurdity of conduct in other respects, preached that doctrine which he had opposed, and continued in it to the end of a laborious and painful life, which terminated in a bloody death.

How this can be accounted for, excepting in the manner in which he himself explains it, is to me impossible to conceive. But upon his hypothesis every thing is perfectly easy. He says that Christ spake to him in person, to convince him of his error, and of the folly of his pursuits, after he had been thrown down from his horse, by the flashing of a supernatural light, as he was on his road to Damascus. And this fact is itself extremely probable from the circumstances of it.

This was not in the night time, when apparitions are commonly pretended to be seen, but at mid-day; not when he was alone, and his mind subject to a sudden panic, or fit of remorse, but in company; and not in the company of christians, or of those who saw and heard enough to make them become christians, but of inveterate en-

mies to christianity, probably his favourite companions, and who when they were afterwards appealed to, could not contradict the facts, of the extraordinary light, and the sound of a voice, though they could not distinguish the *words*; nor could they deny that he was actually struck blind. He was confirmed in the truth of what he was informed of in this vision by recovering his sight, as Christ at the same time foretold, on the prayer of Ananias who baptized him.

The treachery of Judas Iscariot affords a striking evidence of the innocent character, and divine mission of Christ. Circumstanced as this traitor was, and disposed as he must have been, he would certainly have given information of any sinister design of Christ, if he had known of any such thing; and he had the same means of information as the rest of the apostles. His hanging himself was natural enough as the effect of extreme agony and remorse of mind, after so base a piece of treachery, but altogether unaccountable upon the supposition that, by telling the truth only, he might have gained a considerable reward, and at the same time have established himself in the esteem of his country, by exposing an impostor,

postor, who was the object of general odium, and especially with those who had the chief influence in public affairs.

Upon the whole, it cannot, I think, but be allowed, that the testimony that is given to the history and miracles of Christ, of which we have an account in the books of the New Testament, is the testimony of men who were competent witnesses in the case ; having had the fairest opportunity of satisfying themselves concerning the facts, and who had no motive, that we can imagine, for imposing upon the world with respect to them.

Besides the evidence of the divine mission of Christ which arises from the testimony to the reality of his *miracles*, by those who saw and conversed with him, and the tacit acknowledgement of all his contemporaries, we have (on the authority of the same historians) the evidence which arises from the testimony of another prophet, whose claim to a divine communication was allowed by almost the whole body of the Jewish nation, and even the testimony of God himself, declared in supernatural voices from heaven.

The testimony of John the baptist is of considerable importance to the evidence of christianity. The circumstances which at-

tended his birth were very extraordinary, and excited great expectations concerning him. He led a remarkably austere life, without any connection with the world, or its affairs, and had no personal knowledge of Jesus, though they were related. By his exemplary virtue he so far gained the esteem and confidence of the body of the Jews, that the most bigotted and envious of the Pharisees and chief priests, notwithstanding their authority with the people, durst not say in public that he was no prophet. He even died a martyr to his integrity and fidelity, in reproving king Herod.

This remarkable person did not pretend to work miracles, but solemnly declared that he was commissioned to preach the doctrine of repentance, by way of preparation for the coming of the Messiah, and he also solemnly declared that he knew Jesus to be the person by some visible token attending the descent of the spirit of God upon him; by which, he says, it was foretold to him, that he should be able to distinguish the person to whose mission his own was subordinate. Notwithstanding the great credit which John acquired, equal, if not superior to that of any of the former Jewish prophets, he did not pretend to set

set up for himself, but constantly referred his disciples to Jesus, when they were zealously attached to him, and jealous of the rising reputation of the new prophet.

Christ was also declared to be the son and messenger of God by miraculous voices from heaven ; the first of these was pronounced immediately upon his baptism, probably in the hearing of great numbers ; the second on the mount of transfiguration, when only three of his disciples were present ; and the third in the temple, in the hearing of a promiscuous multitude, of whom some, who were at a distance, thought that it thundered, and others said that an angel spake to him. See Luke iii. 22. Mat. xvii. 52. John xii. 28.

To these three different kinds of evidence, namely that of his works, of John the baptist, and of God his father, as well to that of antient prophecies, Jesus himself appeals in his conversation with the Jews. John v. 31, &c.

Some persons seem to be surprized that we find so little in favour of christianity in the writings of Jews and Heathens, who lived about the time of its promulgation. But how can it be supposed that men should speak very favourably of a religion which

they did not chuse to imbrace? Besides christianity has all that testimony which can possibly be had from adversaries. It would be highly unreasonable to expect that Jews or Heathens, continuing such, should expressly acknowledge their belief of the resurrection of Christ; but they acknowledge what is a sufficient ground of *our* belief, namely that the disciples of Christ declared that he did rise from the dead, and that they professed to have seen and conversed with him after his resurrection. This is particularly done by Celsus, and the emperor Julian. Such facts as these being admitted, we are certainly at liberty to reason from them as well as they. The earlier Jews ascribed some of the miracles of Christ to the power of Beelzebub, and many of the later Jews to the secret virtue of some *ineffable name of God*, which they pretend that he stole from the temple, or to some arts of sorcery, which they conceit that he learned in Egypt; but, the miraculous works of Christ being allowed, we are certainly at liberty to laugh at such hypotheses as these, and may think that we act more reasonably in ascribing them to the power of God only.

Besides,

Besides, christianity has the testimony of thousands, who, having been bitter enemies, became converts to it, on farther examination ; and these are, in fact, the most valuable of all testimonies. Indeed, all the early converts to christianity, the apostles themselves not excepted, may be considered as belonging to this class ; because they had strong prejudices to overcome before they could entertain the thought of such a Messiah as Jesus was.

It were to be wished that unbelievers of the present age would carefully consider the evidences which were alledged in favour of christianity by Christ and his apostles themselves, as they are proposed in the gospels and the book of Acts, and endeavour to account for them. Let them particularly consider the objections that were made to them by the unbelievers of those days, and observe what it was which they then took for granted, and let them consider whether, at this day, they can reasonably take less for granted ; or putting themselves in the place of their predecessors, whether they can, in any other respect, make any improvement on their reasonings. If their objections to christianity were really weak and insufficient, their conduct must be condemned,

even by modern unbelievers, who must acknowledge that, with their views of things, they ought to have become christians.

Now it is well known that all the early adversaries of christianity, Jews and Gentiles, not only allowed the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, but also admitted that miracles were really wrought by Christ and his apostles, as an evidence of their having a divine commission ; and it may be presumed that men who were so much interested in detecting the imposture of christianity, as the high priests and rulers among the Jews, and also as the heathen priests, philosophers, and magistrates (some of whom immediately, and all of whom very soon took alarm at the spread of christianity, being in the highest degree exasperated at it) and who had every possible opportunity for examining the credentials of Christ and his apostles, would have taken the most effectual methods to prevent the growth of a religion that was so exceedingly offensive to them ; and they must, no doubt, have been sensible, that the most effectual method would be to remove what the christians themselves alledged to be the foundation of their faith, namely the credibility of their miracles, which

which they asserted to have been wrought, and to be at that very time wrought in its favour. And it appears from the Gospels and the book of *Acts*, that the enemies of christianity did give the closest attention to the miracles of Christ and his apostles, and not being able to question their reality, they had recourse to such hypotheses to account for them, as any unbeliever of the present age would be ashamed of.

Had christianity given no alarm in Judea at the time when it was first proposed, or had the heathen philosophers and magistrates taken no notice of it till after the death of the apostles, the evidence of the truth of christianity would not have had the strength which it now has, from considering that Christ himself was so obnoxious to the Jewish rulers, that they put him to death, and that so violent a persecution was raised against the disciples of Christ, beginning with the very year of his assencion, that only one of the apostles, and hardly any other person of much eminence among the christians died a natural death, but died martyrs to their religion ; and that all the primitive christians, without exception, suffered very great hardships.

The various circumstances which concur to authenticate the miracles of Christ, and the apostles, are well collected into one view by Dr. Jortin, and with it I shall conclude this section. They were wrought by persons who solemnly appealed to God, and who often declared that they would perform them. They were wrought in a public manner, before enemies and unbelievers, in a learned age, and civilized countries, not with any air of ostentation, or for the sake of worldly advantage, but in confirmation of precepts and doctrines agreeable to reason, and useful to mankind, and at a time when their enemies wanted neither power nor inclination to expose them if they had been impostures, and were in no danger either of being insulted by the populace, or persecuted by the civil magistrate for ridiculing the christians. These miracles were also various and numerous, they were of a permanent nature, and might be reviewed and re-examined ; they had nothing fantastical or cruel in them, but were acts of kindness and beneficence. Miracles having ceased for a long time before Christ appeared, the revival of them raised the greater attention. They were attested by proper witnesses, were acknowledged

ledged by adversaries, were foretold by the prophets, and such as the Jews expected from the Messiah, and actually converted multitudes.

## SECTION IV.

*Considerations on the resurrection of Christ,  
and others of a similar nature.*

THE resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact of such particular consequence to the truth of Christianity, and is so remarkably circumstanced with respect to its evidence, that it well deserves a distinct consideration. To this fact our Lord himself had appealed, as one considerable evidence of his divine mission; and though he spake figuratively when he gave his enemies warning of it, it is plain that he was sufficiently understood by them. For no sooner was he dead, and laid in the sepulchre, than the chief priests and rulers of the Jews informed the Roman governor concerning it; and, to prevent any possibility of their being imposed upon by his disciples

disciples stealing the body, and pretending that he had risen from the dead, they obtained a guard of Roman soldiers to watch the sepulchre continually ; and lest the soldiers themselves should have been bribed, or, by any other method have been gained over by the disciples, to connive at their scheme of conveying away the body, they fixed a seal to a very large stone, which covered the mouth of the sepulchre. Having used these precautions, which seem to have been all that human prudence could have dictated, they, no doubt, concluded that, if the disciples should make any attempt to break the sepulchre, they could not but have been observed, and prevented ; or if the disciples should have brought an armed force, sufficiently to overpower the Roman guard, at least some resistance would have been made ; and the carrying off the body by *violence* could have answered no purpose whatever ; so that, upon the whole, they might rest assured that, if the body was not found when they came to inspect the sepulchre, the removal must have been effected either by a miracle, or in such a manner as could not answer the purpose of any imposture.

The event was that the body was removed from the sepulchre, on the day on which Christ had foretold that he should rise from the dead, and this happened very early in the morning; so that very probably, it was not long after the watch had been changed the third time that night.

Let us now examine whether the account which the disciples of Christ, or that which the Jews gave of this event is the more probable. The apostles, who might have had the account from some of the guard, say that, just before the body was removed, there was a great earthquake, and that an angel of God came and rolled away the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre, and sat upon it; that his raiment was white as snow, and his whole appearance particularly bright and dazzling, so that the soldiers were seized with extreme fear, and became as dead men. Upon this, they all dispersed, and some of them went into the city, and told the high priests all that had passed; but they immediately assembling together, with the other rulers of the Jews, gave money to these soldiers, making them promise to give out that while they slept the disciples of Christ stole his body, and assuring them, that they would take care that

that the Roman governor should not punish them for their negligence. Accordingly they did what was required of them, and, no doubt, endeavoured to engage all their companions to tell the same story. But it is not improbable, but that some of them might, in the mean time, have told the truth; and other circumstances, and a variety of subsequent evidence, unquestionably prove that there had been a real resurrection.

The angel was still sitting upon the stone, about break of day, where he was seen by Mary Magdalene, and some other women, who had come with a design to embalm the body, and had brought spices with them for that purpose, not having any expectation of his rising again; but being informed of it by the angel, they went in haste, to acquaint his disciples with it. Two of these, Peter and John, immediately ran to the sepulchre, which they found open, and the body gone; but, instead of any marks of a violent removal, they found the grave cloaths carefully folded up, and laid in separate places, so that some think the body must have miraculously slipped out of them. However it is not at all probable, that they would have been left behind,

hind, and especially so carefully folded, and so regularly disposed, if the body had been removed by violence or stealth.

That Christ should rise again from the dead was perfectly agreeable to the tenor of his former life, and a proper sequel to it; but the more substantial evidence of it is his having been frequently seen by, and having intimately conversed with his former disciples, whose account of it exhibits, in a most natural manner, their surprize and joy, on the occasion of so agreeable, but so unexpected an event. Besides, all the miracles that were wrought by the apostles afterwards, the evidence of which is no less convincing than that of the miracles of Christ himself, and wholly independent of it, are all so many proofs of his resurrection; for they are plainly parts of a great scheme, which necessarily supposes that most important event.

Let us now attend to some circumstances which shew the extreme improbability of the account which the Jews gave of the removal of the body of Jesus, which is that which the christian writers say they put into the mouths of the soldiers above-mentioned. It is evident, from all the circumstances of the history, that the dis-  
ciples

ciples of Christ were too much disconcerted and disheartened by the unexpected death of their master, (which entirely destroyed all the hopes which they had entertained from him) to think of making any attempt to remove his body ; or if they could have removed, and effectually secreted it, what end could that have answered, without powers to carry on the scheme. But the scheme of conveying away the body *by stealth* must have appeared the most improbable of all, as it was necessary for this purpose, that every soldier of the guard should not only have been found sleeping at the same time, but so sound asleep, that the removal of a stone, which several women despaired of being able to stir, should not awaken any of them, and that they should all have slept long enough to give them an opportunity both of removing the stone, and taking off the cloaths and spices, in which the body was wrapped ; and those who are acquainted with the manner in which the Jews prepared the bodies of their dead for sepulture, say that this must have required a considerable time, more indeed, than it can be imagined that persons who had stolen the body would have ventured to employ ; and lastly they must also have had time to carry away the body undiscovered.

This was also to be done upon a hill, so near the city of Jerusalem, that it is now inclosed within the walls of it, when the moon was at the full, and at the time of passover, when both Jerusalem itself and all the neighbouring places must have been crowded with people from all parts of Judea.

It adds to the improbability of this story, that the discipline of the Roman soldiers is known to have been exceedingly strict ; so that they must all of them have expected either death, or some severe punishment for sleeping upon watch ; nor could they have expected any mercy in this case ; least of all could they imagine that the Jewish rulers would interpose in their favour, when it was at their particular request that the guard was obtained, and they were so much interested in the watch being strictly kept ; and yet no punishment followed upon the occasion, which amounts to a full proof that the Jewish rulers were convinced that the soldiers had done all that could be expected of them.

If it be asked how the soldiers could be brought to fall into the measures of the Jewish rulers, and so readily to tell the lye which they put into their mouths ; it may be answered,

answered, that, in the terror and consternation they were in, and afraid of punishment, they might be glad to do any thing they were directed to do, especially upon the promise of impunity and a reward. They might be satisfied that Pilate and their Roman officers would believe nothing of their account of the appearance of an angel, and the miraculous removing of the stone (and they saw nothing more) and they could not pretend that they had been overpowered, when they returned without any marks of having made resistance. Improbable, therefore, as the story was, they might think it the best thing they could do in their circumstances to tell it. It is not unlikely, however, that, reflecting upon the affair afterwards, and hearing the testimony of the apostles to the truth of the resurrection, some of them, at least, might be convinced of it, and give a faithful account of all that they knew concerning it.

If the disciples of Christ had really stolen his body, in the circumstances above-mentioned, it is very extraordinary that the Jews should never have pretended to produce, at least, one positive evidence of the fact. If it had been possible, they would, no doubt, have found somebody, who would

would have declared that they saw the disciples of Christ in the act of removing the stone, of taking or carrying away the body, or something which they might suppose to be the body ; or that some persons, supposed to be the disciples, might have been doing something of this kind, about that time, and near the proper place. We may be satisfied, therefore, that there was no circumstance of this kind of which the Jewish rulers could hope to avail themselves, in order to strengthen their assertion of the body having been stolen.

When the apostles, presently after this, appeared publicly in Jerusalem, preaching the gospel, and boldly asserting the resurrection of Christ, do the Jewish rulers behave to them as men whom they could convict of a notorious cheat ? Nay they were so far from venturing to charge them with any such thing, that they only punished and threatened them, insisting that they should say no more of the matter. Would the orator Tertullus have missed so fine a topic of declamation, had there been the least colour of truth in this story, when, before King Agrippa, he was bitterly inveighing against Paul, who affirmed that Jesus was alive, when the Jews said that he

he was dead? Or could Gamaliel, one of the most eminent of the Jewish doctors, have possibly supposed that the hand of God *might* be with the apostles, and have given the advice which he did upon that occasion, if he had known that a cheat had been discovered with respect to the resurrection; or would the whole Sanhedrim have so readily followed his advice, upon that supposition?

Lastly, it may be observed, as a proof of the extreme futility of this story, that the only Evangelist who mentions it makes no attempt to refute it, seeming to regard it as a thing that was palpably false, and sufficiently known to be so.

Upon the whole, it seems to be hardly possible that the circumstances attending the resurrection of Christ, or the promulgation of the gospel, which was consequent upon it, could have been better adapted to gain the full conviction of the world in general, and especially in distant ages. The ingenuity of man may fancy a resurrection, and the promulgation of such a religion as the christian, so circumstanced, as, it *may be thought*, would have produced a greater effect; but it does not seem difficult to demonstrate, that any alteration which has yet

yet been suggested for this purpose would have been unfavourable to the real weight of the evidence.

It has been said that Christ ought to have made his appearance to the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, in full assembly, and have appeared as publickly after, as he had done before his resurrection. But admitting that this had been the case, I doubt not but the same obdurate minds, which were not conciliated, but more exasperated against him after their being themselves witnesses of the resurrection of Lazarus, and all the other miracles of Christ, would only have been rendered still more inveterate by any other miracles, wrought in favour of a person, who would have done no more than he did in a temporal respect. Besides, it is plain that they actually had *sufficient* evidence of the resurrection of Christ, which is all that can reasonably be required, and yet did not become christians.

Admitting, however, that the consequence of Christ's appearing in this public manner had been the conversion of the body of the Jewish nation, and of such strangers as should have happened to have been residing at Jerusalem, or in Judea, at that time; would it not have been said, by the unbelievers

unbelievers of this remote age, that the rulers of the Jews and the Roman governor were in the secret; and that, having the management of the whole affair, they could easily make out the story of a resurrection, or any thing else, which they might have thought better suited to answer their purpose; and that all the prophecies which speak of a suffering Messiah had been undoubtedly forged by them. These things might easily have been said even in the same age, and at no greater distance than Rome, and much more plausibly than many things that are objected to christianity at this day.

Had Christ himself, after such an event, made his appearance in Rome, accompanied by a solemn deputation of the Jewish elders, he would probably have been treated with ridicule, as the people of Rome might have said, that he had never been dead. But let us farther admit, that the Roman emperor, his court, all the chief men in the empire, and the bulk of the people in that age had embraced christianity, and consequently that no christian had been persecuted to death for his religion, how would the thing have looked at this distance? Would it not have been said, by sceptical people, that it had all the marks

of

of a scheme of worldly policy, and that all the great men of those times had agreed to frame a better kind of religion, when the old systems were worn out? They would have said, that there was no body in those times who had properly inquired into the truth of the facts, or that all the contrary evidence had been suppressed, and that the rapid progress of the new religion was the effect of worldly encouragement.

Had the witnesses of the resurrection been not the whole Jewish nation, but a number of persons of high rank in life, it might have been said that they had availed themselves of their power, and influence with the people, to gain credit to their scheme.

At present, the witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, and of all the great events on which the truth of christianity is founded, are such as shew that the wisdom of God is superior to that of men, being the most unexceptionable that could have been thought of. They were men of middling circumstances, neither desperate through poverty on the one hand, nor peculiarly within the influence of ambition on the other. They were men of plain understandings, neither so weak as to have

been easily imposed upon, nor so cunning and crafty as to have had it in their power to impose upon others. They were men of such irreproachable characters, as to afford the least possible suspicion of such a design. They were also insufficient numbers.

Such men as these were induced, by the evidence of what they saw and heard, in favour of the doctrines and pretensions of Christ, to act counter to the strongest prejudices to which mankind can be subject, they risked every thing that was valuable to them, their ease, their honest reputation, their little fortunes, and their lives. Having been men of low occupations, and timid natures, they boldly preached the doctrine of their master, notwithstanding the most determined opposition from all the powers of the world; and, perhaps, what is the hardest trial of all, they were every where exposed to the greatest ridicule and insult. In these circumstances was Christianity professed through the whole Roman empire, for the space of three hundred years.

What considerably strengthens this evidence, with respect to the world at large, is that the Jews are still the inveterate enemies

mies of christianity ; so that they cannot be suspected of having ever acted in concert with christians ; but should they be gained over even at present, or in any period of time before the gospel shall have been sufficiently preached through the whole world, it might have an unfavourable aspect with respect to those nations who should not then be converted, or their remote posterity ; so important a circumstance to the evidence of christianity is the general *unbelief of the Jews*; agreeable to the ideas of the apostle Paul, *He bath shut them up in unbelief, that he might have mercy on all.* On the other hand when the gospel shall have been sufficiently preached through the whole world, the general conversion of the Jews, and their restoration to their own country, after being so long a dispersed but a distinct people (which is the subject of so many prophecies) will be such an additional confirmation of the truth of the whole system of revelation, as perhaps no force of prejudice will be able to resist. Of such importance to the whole world will be the extraordinary providence which has attended, and which still attends this people.

Lastly, the very great corruptions of christianity have been the occasion of many

persons abandoning it, and writing against it, in this learned and inquisitive age; by which means the evidences of it have stood such a test as no scheme of religion was ever put to before; and yet, instead of appearing to disadvantage under the severe scrutiny, this trial has been a means of purging it from its many corruptions; men of the greatest virtue, learning, and diligent inquiry, and even many of those who have the least worldly interest in promoting the belief of it, are its steadiest friends; and its enemies are generally such persons as have manifestly never given sufficient attention to the subject, or have not had a competent share of learning to qualify them to judge for themselves; and it is also notorious that, very many of them are men of profligate lives and characters, whose minds must, therefore, be unfavourably disposed with respect to the evidences of christianity; so that they must be exceedingly biased, and consequently, very incompetent judges in the case.

Besides, the things that modern unbelievers cavil at are, generally, trifling circumstances, many of which a better translation of an obscure passage in the books of scripture sufficiently obviates; or else they

they are levelled not against what christianity really is, but what it has been supposed to be, in ignorant and corrupt ages; and no unbeliever has pretended to detect the imposture of christianity in the same manner in which other impostures have been detected, namely by sufficient historical evidence; nor have they at all accounted for the rise and propagation of it, on the supposition of its being false.

Upon the whole, it does not appear to me that the wisdom of man could have devised the circumstances of a miraculous history, so as to make it so truly credible as that of the gospel is. If those who are now the most ingenious of its adversaries had had the choice of the circumstances, and had prescribed them *a priori*, it is very probable that they might have been so ill adapted to the end, that the belief of it would have failed, in the natural course of things, long before this time; whereas, as things are now circumstanced, the original evidence is so admirably adjusted, as to be sufficient, without any new revelation, to establish the christian faith, perhaps, to the end of the world; and this consideration certainly furnishes a strong additional evidence of the truth of christianity, and

also serves to give us a striking idea of the wisdom of God, and the weakness of man.

## SECTION V.

*Of the credibility of the Old Testament history.*

IF I be asked why I believe the history of those divine interpositions which are recorded in the *Old Testament*, I may answer, that I am under a necessity of admitting this, in consequence of believing the history of Christ and his apostles, as it is written by the Evangelists. For we there find that the faith of the Jews was also the serious belief of Christ and his apostles, and that one of the arguments which they made use of for the proof of his divine mission was the fulfilment of the prophecies of the *Old Testament*, in which the character of Christ, the principal circumstances of his history, and the nature and extent of the kingdom of God under him were particularly pointed out.

In

In short, it is manifest, from the whole tenor of the New Testament, that Christianity is only a part of one grand dispensation of religion, and that it is the completion and proper sequel of Judaism; for we there find it every where taken for granted, that God revealed his will in a more imperfect manner to Moses, and the succeeding prophets, before the more perfect revelation of it by Christ and his apostles.

But, independent of this kind of evidence which ought to have the greatest weight with all Christians, there is not wanting sufficient reason to believe that the Jewish religion is true and divine, admitting what has been already proved, viz. the authenticity of the books of the Old Testament. That the divine being interposed in a miraculous manner in the affairs of the Jewish nation, and, more especially, that he dictated the law which Moses communicated to the children of Israel, we have the testimony not only of Moses himself, and of all the prophets who wrote the books of the Old Testament; but we have, in fact, the testimony of all the Jewish nation, who were in circumstances in which they cannot be imagined to have been im-

posed upon themselves, or to have had any motive to impose upon others.

That the history of the Jews, and of the miraculous interpositions of God in their favour, should, from the earliest accounts of them, have been firmly believed by the whole body of that nation, and that, even in their present dispersed and calamitous situation, which has continued for seventeen hundred years, they should retain the same belief, cannot but be admitted to have the greatest weight.

Supposing the history of the departure from Egypt, and all the miraculous circumstances attending it, to have been a mere fiction, it must have been so *notoriously* false, that it could not but have been rejected, whenever it had been published. For things of so extraordinary a nature, on which the authority of all their laws, their most solemn customs, and religious rites, entirely depended, could not but have gained universal attention. The fabulous histories of other nations were always invented very late; and as nothing depended upon them, they may easily be supposed to have been introduced *gradually*, without much notice or alarm. Besides, none of them have stood the test of

a rigid scrutiny, but have fallen into universal contempt.

It is true that the history of the Old Testament sets the Jewish nation in general in a very favourable point of light, and, on that account, it may be supposed that they would the more readily acquiesce in it, and wish to have it pass for true with their neighbours; but in other respects, also, it represents them, and their most distinguished ancestors, in a very unfavourable light, leaving them under the imputation of so many cruel and base actions, as no descendant of theirs would have wished them to lie under. Among these is the history of Abraham and Isaac denying their wives, the deceit of Jacob, and the abominable treachery of two of his sons, together with the very great faults, and even aggravated crimes of David, and others of their most illustrious heroes and princes.

The fabulous histories of the Greeks and Romans are written in a manner very different from this. Even Josephus, the Jewish historian, who had the Old Testament to write from, and who had it not in his power to forge or alter much, endeavours to give the whole history as favourable a turn as possible; intirely suppressing

the story of the golden calf, and others which might tend to give foreigners a disadvantageous idea of his ancestors and nation. What kind of a history may we suppose that such a writer as this would have *invented*, if he had been fairly at liberty to do it ; and what does a history written upon so very different a plan, as that of the Old Testament, exhibit, but the *face of truth*, however disagreeable and mortifying.

All the most distinguished rites and customs of the Jews are intimately connected with, and founded upon the most distinguished miraculous facts in their history ; and some of them, are such as we cannot suppose that any nation would voluntarily impose upon themselves, being exceedingly burdensome, and seemingly hazardous. Among these we may reckon the rite of circumcision, which was probably borrowed by some other nations from them ; a weekly day of rest from labour, not plowing their fields, or tilling their grounds, every seventh year, and the appearance of all their males three times in a year at one particular place, when the borders of their country must have been left defenceless, and they could have no dependence but upon an extraordinary providence for their security,

security, which was promised in their law. Add to this that they were surrounded by powerful and enterprising nations, who entertained an inveterate antipathy against them, and consequently could not be expected to neglect the fair opportunities which their festival solemnities afforded to attack their borders, had they not been restrained by a superior influence. Yet their whole history affords not a single instance of any inroad being made upon them at those times.

To this may be added their being forbidden to have any foreign commerce, or to have many horses, which was the great pride of their neighbours in time of peace, and a great advantage to them in time of war.

It has often been said that Moses himself, without any divine instruction, might have formed the body of laws recorded in his writings, and have given all the other directions which he pretended to have received from God. But, besides that this supposition can never account for the whole nation having always believed that they had been led through the red sea, been fed with manna forty years, heard a supernatural voice delivering the ten commandments from mount Sinai, and having cro-

fed the river Jordan without either boat or bridge, &c. &c. &c; all which facts we find recognized in the most solemn offices of their stated public worship, many centuries after the time of Moses, it is in itself very improbable.

Moses appears, from many circumstances in his history, to have been a man of the greatest meekness, modesty, and diffidence. He was exceedingly averse to assume any public character; he was easily governed by the advice of others; and, what is particularly worthy of consideration, he wanted those talents which are peculiarly requisite for the part he is supposed to have acted, viz. those of an *Orator* and a *Warrior*. He had such an impediment in his speech, that he was obliged to take his brother Aaron to speak for him before Pharoah, and the Israelites. The whole history of their march through the wilderness shews that he had nothing of a military turn, without which more especially no man could have expected to do any thing at the head of a people just revolted from the Egyptians. For it is observable, that in the engagements which they had with those people who opposed their passage, Moses never headed them himself, but left the whole

whole command to Joshua, and others, while he was praying for them at a distance.

It has been said that Moses was a man of excellent understanding and judgement, but his own history by no means favours that supposition. For, excepting those orders and institutions which he published as from God, almost every thing else that is recorded by him shows him to have been a weak man, and of a gross understanding. His behaviour with respect to the killing of the Egyptian, and his embarrassment with a multiplicity of business, till he was relieved by the sensible advice of Jethro, and many other circumstances might be alledged in support of this opinion. These things sufficiently demonstrate that Moses, personally considered, was by no means a man capable of devising such a system of laws as his books contain, or of conducting that most intractable nation, as they were conducted, forty years through the wilderness.

Besides, if Moses had such a capacity, and had been of such a disposition as would have prompted him to act such an imposition as this, he would certainly have made some better provision than he did for his own family and tribe. He had children  
of

of his own, and yet they did not succeed him in his extraordinary offices and power, nor do we find them possessed of any peculiar privilege or advantage whatever. They were not even of the higher order of priests, who yet enjoyed no privilege worth coveting; and the tribe of Levi in general, to which he belonged, was worse provided for than any other of the twelve; and, what is particularly disgraceful, Moses himself relates that the posterity of Levi were dispersed among the rest of the tribes as a punishment for the baseness and cruelty of their ancestor, in the affair of the Shechemites.

The tribe for which the greatest honours were reserved, in the prophecies of both Jacob and Moses, was that of Judah, with which Moses had no particular connection. This was the tribe which was marked out as the seat of preheminence and power, and especially as the tribe from which the Messiah was to arise.

Besides, if Moses had meant to do any great thing for himself, it is not likely that he would have detained the Israelites so long in the wilderness. Forty years exceeds the whole term of the active part of a man's life, according to the common course

course of it ; and a short time would have been sufficient to instruct the people in the use of weapons, and the art of war, as it was practised in those rude times. Indeed, we do not find that much attention was given to this business, but that, on the contrary, almost their whole time was taken up with instructions on the subjects of legislation, religion, and morals.

Though the Jewish history is far more antient than that of any other nation in the world, and therefore we cannot expect to find it confirmed by any other accounts of such early transactions, yet, from the time that the Greeks and other nations began to write history, their accounts are sufficiently agreeable to the history of the Old Testament, allowance being made for the uncertainty there must have been in the communication of intelligence, in an age in which remote nations had very little intercourse. However, all the leading facts of the Jewish history, even those which respect Moses himself, the deliverance of the Israelites out of the power of the Egyptians, and many particulars in their subsequent history, are related by historians of other nations, with such a mixture of fable and mistake, as might be expected from people

people who had no better means of being informed concerning them.

As to the history of the *fall of man*, and other particulars preceding the time of Moses, and the memory of his immediate ancestors, it may be allowed that there is a mixture of fable, or allegory in it, without affecting the history that is properly *Mosaic*, and consequently the truth of the Jewish religion. It should be considered, however, that Moses relates only such of the more remarkable translations of the times preceding his own, and of his remote ancestors, as it may well be supposed that their descendants would carefully, and might easily transmit to their posterity; and only eight generations intervened between Moses and Noah.

P A R T

## P A R T IV.

## THE EVIDENCE OF THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN REVELATIONS DERIVED FROM PRESENT APPEARANCES,

## S E C T I O N I.

*Arguments from the existence, propagation, and good effects of the Jewish and Christian religions.*

HAVING considered the evidence of the Jewish and Christian revelations, as far as it depends upon the testimony of those who received them, and especially of those who have written the history of them, I shall now proceed to lay before my readers some evidence of a different kind, the facts from which it arises being either the subject of universal observation, or recorded in general histories, of universally allowed credit.

The

The very existence and reception of such systems of religion as the Jewish and christian are remarkable facts of this kind. That other religions, such as the different species of heathenism, and that of Mohammed, should have been established, and gained credit, may be accounted for without supposing them to be true; but the Jewish and christian religions were so circumstanced, at their institution, that it seems impossible to account either for their existence, or the credit which they are known to have obtained, without supposing them to be true and divine.

The faith of Jews and christians respecting God, as one being, the maker, governor, and righteous judge of all; concerning moral duty, and a future state, are so agreeable to reason, and yet so much more just and sublime than the moral and religious systems of other nations, especially about the time when these two religions were severally established (in which both the religion and morals of all their neighbouring nations were remarkably corrupt) that, considering the situation of the Jews and primitive christians, with respect to study and inquiry, we cannot but conclude that they must have had sources of information which other

other nations had not. Indeed, the writings of the Jews and christians bear no traces of their religious knowledge being the deduction of any extraordinary sagacity or reasoning of their own ; and men who attain to superior knowledge by their own reasoning, and superior powers, are generally ready enough to make a shew of their reason, and are willing to secure to themselves whatever reputation can accrue to themselves from it. But here we find admirable systems of religious and moral knowledge published by persons who disclaim all merit with respect to them, and who do not pretend to have discovered them by their own powers.

The great object of these two religions, especially as fully revealed in the christian, which was the completion of the whole scheme, is so sublime and excellent, that it could hardly have had any other source than the universal parent of good. This object is no less than to teach universal impartial virtue, and a superiority of mind to this world, in a firm faith of another and a better after death ; and this truly catholic religion is not calculated for the use of any one people only, or made subservient to any particular form of civil government,

ment, but is designed to unite and bless all the nations of the world, under one spiritual head Christ Jesus.

These observations relate to the Jewish and christian religions jointly, I shall now mention a few others which relate to them severally.

The religious poems and other compositions of the Jews, contain sentiments so admirably just and sublime, that the slightest comparison of them with the religious hymns of other nations, even in the most enlightened ages, cannot but lead us to suspect that the Jews were possessed of advantages for religious knowledge far superior to those of any other people.

While all their neighbouring nations were running fast into idolatry, and especially the worship of the sun, moon, and stars, parcelling out the world into a great number of principalities, and assigning a separate divinity for each, Moses teaches a religion which begins with asserting that *one God*, by the word of his own power, and without the assistance or instrumentality of any inferior intelligent being, created the heavens and the earth, and even the sun, moon, and stars themselves, and appointed the proper uses of them all; which struck

at the very foundation of the religious systems of all other nations. That great principle which was abandoned by all other nations, namely the worship of one God, possessor of heaven and earth, and who fills both heaven and earth with his presence, was even the fundamental maxim of the Jewish state, and the great foundation of their civil, as well as religious government.

While the rest of the world were practising the most abominably impure and cruel rites, as acts of religious worship, and thought to recommend themselves to the favour of their gods, by the most absurd and unmeaning ceremonies, without ever having recourse to moral virtue for that purpose, Moses indeed instituted a ceremonial worship; but both he and all the Jewish prophets, repeatedly, and in the strongest terms, assert the perfect moral character of the supreme being, the infinitely greater importance of purity of heart and integrity of life, and the utter insignificance of any rites, ceremonies, or offerings without them.

While other nations were addicted to the most wretched superstitions, having recourse to various divinations, and arts of witchcraft,

witchcraft, whenever they wanted to get intelligence concerning future events, or the assistance of superior powers, the Jewish people were taught to hold all these things in deserved contempt, and abhorrence. They were instructed to expect no information concerning future events, or assistance in any undertaking, but from the one living and true God; and they were commanded to punish all those who pretended to the abominable arts of divination and witchcraft with death. It is to be observed, also, that the Jewish prophets delivered themselves with gravity and seriousness, worthy of the majesty of him that sent them, and did not use those violent convulsions, foamings at the mouth, and extravagant gestures, which the heathen diviners had recourse to, in order to dazzle and impose upon those who consulted them.

So far is there from being any pretence for saying that the Jews were naturally more intelligent than their neighbours, and attained these just notions of religion and morality by their own reason and good sense, that their own history always represents them as stiff necked, and slow of understanding; and to this very day their enemies constantly reproach them as being

ing the most stupid of mankind. Besides, their history shews that the Jews were naturally as prone to idolatry and superstition as any other people could be, and their frequent relapses into the idolatry of their neighbours, notwithstanding the most express warnings, and awful judgements, demonstrate that, had it not been for divine instructions, inculcated again and again, they would have been far from shewing an example of a purer religion, or more rational worship than such as prevailed in other countries. It must also be observed, that the rigorous adherence of the Jews to their religion at present, and which has continued for ages, under the greatest external discouragements, is such, as, considering their former proneness to desert it, demonstrates that they must have received the most convincing proof of its truth and divinity.

While the philosophers of other nations taught an exceedingly confined morality, treating those of their own nation only as brethren, and the rest of mankind as enemies, Moses inculcates the principles of the greatest humanity and tenderness in the treatment of strangers, reminding them that they themselves had been strangers in the land

land of Egypt, and that they knew the heart of a stranger,

Upon the whole, it cannot be said that the religion and morality of the books of Moses was such as might have been expected from the time in which he lived. Was it similar to any thing he could have learned in Egypt, or in any of the neighbouring countries? On the contrary, it was in almost every respect most remarkably the reverse of the opinions and practices of those times, and therefore must have had some other origin.

The form of a free and equal government, which was particularly recommended to the Jews, and under which they lived for a considerable time, was one of which there is no other example in the East, where kingly and arbitrary governments only are known even to this day. Such especially was the government of Egypt, where they had resided above two hundred years, and to the institutions of which it appears that they were remarkably prone, notwithstanding what they had suffered in that country; and all the land of Canaan was under the dominion of a great number of petty kings or tyrants; whereas it is observed of the Israelites, before the times of Saul (by whose

whose appointment to be king they made an infringement in their original constitution) that every man did what was right in his own eyes. Indeed, the civil government of the Hebrews was so exceedingly favourable to liberty, virtue, and domestic happiness, as, considering the many absurd and iniquitous constitutions of other nations, furnishes a very strong argument for its being of divine appointment.

Lastly, I shall observe that the prophecies of the Old Testament, which have been exactly fulfilled, some of them long since the books which contain them were translated into other languages, and dispersed all over the world, fully prove that the writers of them had divine communications. But this argument I reserve for a distinct consideration, in favour of the whole system of Jewish and Christian revelation, as one.

The very pretensions of Jesus Christ are a sufficient proof that there was something supernatural in his case. Before his time the Jews had had no prophets for several hundred years, nor do they seem to have expected any before the appearance of the Messiah, or his forerunner; and no Jew had any idea of ex-

tending the proper *kingdom of God* to those who did not conform to the institutions of Moses. How then should it ever have come into the head of any Jew, and especially a person so obscurely born, and so privately educated as Jesus was, to assume more power than any of their former prophets, more than even Moses himself had pretended to, and to act and speak from God by a more constant and intimate kind of inspiration than any before him? How can it be supposed that any Jew should have formed the *idea*, or the *wish*, to say nothing of the *power* of effecting a thing so fundamentally contrary to any notion that was ever entertained by a Jew, whether, with respect to his character, he was virtuous or vicious.

When the wisest of the heathen philosophers entertained great doubts with respect to a future state, when the belief of it was almost worn out in the world, how can we account for Christ's preaching, with such steadiness and assurance as he did, the doctrine not only of a future state, but of a *resurrection*, of which nothing in nature could have given any man the least idea, and yet to this resurrection Christ referred all the hopes of his followers, and gave the fullest proof of his own intire persuasion

sion concerning it, by calmly yielding himself up to death, in full confidence of rising again from the dead in a very few days, as a proof of the divinity of his doctrine and mission, and a pattern of a future and general resurrection. How, I say, can we account for these extraordinary views, or this constancy in the pursuit of them, but upon the supposition that Christ was inspired, and authorized by God in preaching and acting as he did ?

The rise of so remarkable a religion as the christian, in the circumstances in which it made its first appearance, and also the invincible patience and fortitude of the primitive christians, in persevering in the profession of the gospel, notwithstanding the ridicule and severe persecution to which they were thereby exposed, both from the Jews and the rest of the world, and the readiness with which such numbers of them died martyrs to their profession, are easily accounted for on the supposition that christianity is true, but they must certainly be puzzling facts to an unbeliever, who considers the uniformity of human nature, how strong a conviction the conduct of the primitive christians implies, and what proofs are necessary to produce that conviction ;

and this not in the case of a single person, for which no reason would have been required, but of great numbers, not of Jews only, but of all nations of the world, and some the most learned and inquisitive of their age.

The time and manner in which the Jewish and christian revelations were promulgated were so admirably adapted to the state and circumstances of the world, and were such a seasonable check upon the disorders of it, as makes it exceedingly probable that a scheme so truly excellent, and so seasonably applied, could only proceed from the *father of lights*, and the *giver of every good and perfect gift*.

Abraham and his posterity began to be distinguished by God at the very time that the primitive religion of mankind began to degenerate into idolatry ; so that, for many ages, they bore their testimony to the unity, the supremacy, moral character, and government of God ; and being situated in the very center of the then civilized part of the world, they must have been some check upon the prevailing idolatry and wickedness which accompanied it. And, bad as the state of things was in the heathen world, it is very probable that, without this provision, it would have been much

much worse ; and it is remarkable that the idolatry and wickedness of the great civilized nations, in the neighbourhood of Judea, far exceeded that of the more uncivilized part of the world. The systems of idolatry which now subsist in Asia, Africa, or America, are innocent things compared with the horrid systems of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Canaanites, or Tyrians, or even than the religions of Greece, of Rome, and that of all this western part of the world.

When the Jews were infected by the religious customs of their neighbours, and were brought back to the worship of the one true God (as they always were) by very severe judgements, in which the hand of God was very conspicuous, particularly when they were brought back from a state of captivity among other nations, it could not but be an useful lesson to their neighbours, as well as to themselves ; and many facts in the Jewish history make it evident that their religion, and their prophets were much revered in the neighbouring states. This we see particularly in the history of Jonah's preaching to the Ninevites, and of the application made to the prophet Elisha by Naaman, and Hazael, persons of dis-

tinguished rank in the court of the king of Syria. The decrees of Nebuchadnezzer king of Babylon also, and those of the first kings of Persia, which were published through all the provinces of those extensive empires, must have made the Jews and their religion generally known and respected.

In later times, after the conquest of Alexander the Great, we both find great numbers of strangers residing in Judea, on the account of religion, and also that the Jews themselves were dispersed in a most remarkable manner, into every part of the civilized world, there being no city, or place of note, without them. Their assiduity in making proselytes is sufficiently known, and the effects of it are manifest in the numbers of *devout Gentiles*, who were brought over to the worship of the true God, though it is probable they did not chuse to be initiated into all the rites of the Jewish religion.

That the benefit of the Jewish religion was not to be confined to that nation, but was also to have a considerable influence on the minds even of distant nations, is evident from many passages of the books of Moses; as when it is said that God would be

be glorified by their means in the sight of all the heathen, &c. See Deut. iv. 6. Ps. xvi. 23.

The christian religion has evidently effected a reformation of the idolatry, and abominable customs of the Gentile world; an effect which all the wisdom and philosophy of mankind would never have produced. There are numerous testimonies of the heathens in favour of the good morals of the primitive christians. Celsus owns that there were among them many temperate, modest, and understanding persons; and the Emperor Julian recommends to the heathen pontiffs the example of the christians, for their kindness and humanity to strangers, and not only to those of their own religion, but to the heathens, and for their seeming sanctity of life; and to this he ascribes the progress that christianity had made in the world.

Christianity has also bettered the state of the world in a civil and political respect, giving men a just idea of their mutual relations and natural rights, and thereby gradually abolishing slavery, with the servile ideas which introduced it, and also many cruel and barbarous customs. The generous principles of christianity have greatly contributed to render those Euro-

pean governments, which are nominally arbitrary, more favourable to security and happiness than the freest antient heathen states. The corruption of christianity has, no doubt, greatly lessened its good effects; but still, as it may be clearly proved that the very worst state of Christendom, with respect to religion, and the influence of it, was preferable to heathenism, at the time of the promulgation of christianity, it may be hoped that, with the restoration of genuine christianity, we shall see the revival of all the happy effects of it.

The time of the promulgation of christianity was the most seasonable that could have been chosen, both with respect to its evidence, and its salutary effects. It is unquestionable that the heathen world was then most deplorably corrupt, without the least hope of a remedy by any natural means; and even the generality of the Jews had greatly departed from the genuine moral principles of their own divine religion, and a very considerable sect of them had abandoned the doctrine of a future state.

At this remarkable period almost all the civilized part of the world composed one immense empire, by which means the knowledge

ledge of christianity was readily communicated from one country to another ; and the apostles had the easier access to every place of note by means of the Jews, who were previously settled there, in whose synagogues they had an opportunity of preaching both to the Jews, and also to the Gentile inhabitants.

It was, also, a circumstance of great moment to the evidence of christianity, that it was promulgated in the most learned and inquisitive age in all antiquity ; so that great numbers of persons would have both the inclination, and ability to inquire into it, and satisfy themselves concerning it.

All these circumstances put together certainly give us the idea of a wise and kind parent, interposing in favour of his offspring, at a time when they stood in most need of it, adapting his relief to their real occasions, and applying it in the most seasonable and judicious manner.

## SECTION II.

*Arguments from Standing Customs, &c. in favour of the Jewish and christian religions.*

**T**HREE are several religious customs which have been constantly observed by Jews and Christians, concerning which no probable conjecture can be formed, except that which is alledged in the history of those revelations, as the observance of one day in seven for the purpose of rest from labour, in commemoration of God's having rested or ceased from his work after the six days of creation; the *Passover*, in commemoration of the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites when all the first born of the Egyptians were destroyed; the feast of *Pentecost*, which was designed to perpetuate the memory of the giving of the law from mount Sinai; and the feast of *tabernacles*, to remind them of their having lived in tents in their passage through

through the wilderness. Of this kind, also, is the celebration of the *Lord's-Supper* among christians, in order to commemorate the death of Christ, which it cannot be supposed that they would have done, if he had not likewise risen from the dead, as he himself had foretold..

Now *solemn customs* are universally acknowledged to be, in many cases, the best memorials of important events ; because they suppose a whole people repeating their testimony to them, as often as the rite is celebrated ; and this being continued from generation to generation, the original evidence has all the strength that it could possibly have, when transmitted to us by succession.

It will be said that we find in the heathen world religious customs, which are said to have been instituted in commemoration of such remarkable events as suppose the truth of their religions, as the Eleusinian mysteries, in which were represented the rape of Proserpine, and the introduction of corn among the Athenians by her mother Ceres. But there is this essential difference between the religious customs of the Jews or christians, and such as these among the heathens. The Jews and christians have

written histories of all their religious institutions, of equal antiquity with the institutions themselves ; and in these histories both the origin of the custom is recorded, and the manner in which every thing relating to it is to be performed, is particularly described. On the contrary, the Greek and Roman writers of later ages, finding a practice in use, before the invention of letters, might easily add to the traditional account of it, and so embellish the narration, that, in time, the use of the custom, which had some foundation in history, might be essentially changed.

Thus I make no doubt but that, with respect to the Eleusinian mysteries, there was a woman called Ceres, who, or her son Triptolemus, taught the Athenians the use of corn, that she had a daughter called Proserpine, who was stolen from her by some person whose name was Pluto. But that this Pluto was God of the infernal regions, and carried his wife thither, and that Ceres lighted a torch at mount Etna, and went in quest of her all over the world, was, most probably, an embellishment of the poets, and no necessary inference from the custom.

Customs with merely traditional explanations are very apt to vary in different places, so that, in a course of many years, there being no written history to rectify any mistake, both the practice itself, and the account of it, may easily become, by means of successive innovations, quite unlike what they were originally. If we had not histories of England to have recourse to, how differently might our customs of wearing oak on the twenty-ninth of May, and making bon-fires on the fifth of November have been represented? Nay, we have many customs which have, no doubt, been kept up, without interruption from the time of heathenism, the origin of which is merely conjectural, even among the learned, and altogether unknown to the common people who practice them.

On the subject of this part of my work I must observe, that the earth itself bears several indelible marks of the transactions which are recorded in the histories of the Jewish and christian religions. At least, they are such as are easily and clearly accounted for, on the supposition that those histories are true, and they are not easily accounted for on the supposition that they are false.

That

That there has been some such convulsion in the earth, as must have been produced by the general deluge, is acknowledged by many naturalists, even those who are not believers in revelation. The dead sea is very likely to have been occasioned by such a destruction of an inhabited country as is related in the Mosaic history of Sodom and Gomorrah. Travellers of unquestionable authority say, that it is almost impossible to trace the progress of the children of Israel through the wilderness. More especially, several of them have given drawings of the rock at Rephidim, and they are unanimous in their opinion, that the holes and channels which are worn in it must have been made by water, and yet that it is in a place where it is not at all probable that there should ever have been any natural spring or river, and where there is far from being any water at present. Matthew says, that the *rocks were rent* at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus; and travellers say that there is, at this day, a most remarkable cleft in the rocks of mount Calvary, such as cannot well be supposed to have been produced by any natural earthquake, not having separated the *strata*, but dividing them all perpendicularly. These

These last mentioned circumstances are far from amounting to a demonstration of the truth of the Jewish and christian histories, but they agree so remarkably with them, as must add to their credibility, and all the facts which have been recited in this part put together, certainly represent the known state of things to be such, as cannot be accounted for without supposing those histories to be true. Admitting the truth of those histories, the present state of things has arisen easily and naturally from the preceeding, but on the contrary supposition, we can see no connection between them, so that what is known to all the world, and is the subject of every days observation, is altogether inexplicable.

## S E C T I O N III.

*Various internal evidences of the truth of the scripture history.*

**B**ESIDES the *direct* evidences, which may be drawn from the canonical books of the New Testament, in favour of the truth of christianity, an attentive reader of them cannot but observe several internal characters,

characters, which bear the strongest marks of genuinness and truth, on account of their perfect resemblance to other genuine and true histories. Some of these circumstances, intermixed, as they necessarily are, with others of a different nature, I shall take notice of in this place. Every thing of this nature is plainly a *standing evidence* of the truth of the christian history, independent of any testimony in its favour.

The whole of the scripture history abounds with so many particulars concerning times, places, and persons, as are strong internal marks of authenticity, and make it look exceedingly unlike any fiction. Besides, it is hardly possible to imagine any reason or motive for contriving such a history as that of the Old Testament, and endeavouring to impose it upon the Jewish nation, as the genuine history of their ancestors, and the only authentic standard of their laws and customs.

The Jewish history is also very unlike the accounts which the writers of all other nations have given of their antiquities, and has much more the appearance of truth, with respect to the times assigned for *generations of men*, and *successions of Kings*. Those of the Jewish history, from before the

the time of Moses, are agreeable to the present state of things, and the present condition of human life, whereas the antient histories of Egypt, Affyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome, represent the term of human life, and the state of human affairs, as in a condition much unlike what it is now, and such as it is still more improbable that it should have been then. The reigns of Kings do not, at a medium, exceed 19 years. This Sir Isaac Newton has shewn from the histories of all nations which are certainly known to us. Now those of the Kings of Judah and Israel do not exceed, but fall short of this number; whereas those of the states above-mentioned are said to have reigned, one with another, some thirty, and others forty years a piece, and this in times of great confusion, when many of them died violent deaths. In like manner, the generations of men, at a medium, are found, by Sir Isaac Newton, to have had an interval of about thirty years, and such they will be found to have been in the Jewish history, which is, therefore, probable; but in those of some other nations, this interval must have been fifty or sixty years, which is altogether improbable.

The

The different accounts of the same transaction, written by different Evangelists, agree in all the principal things, which shews that they had equally attended to them, and had the same ideas of them; but they relate their histories in a different order and manner, and with many variations in small circumstances; which shews that they did not write in concert, as they must have done to have agreed so well as they do, if they had not written from their memories, which were equally impressed with the idea of all the principal transactions.

The traces of a most *excellent character*, especially of great humility, integrity, benevolence and devotion, which are apparent in the authors of the New Testament, supply a very strong internal proof, that they have not endeavoured to impose upon mankind. Whether a man himself may intend to do it or not, it will be impossible for him either to speak or write much, without giving to an attentive observer, some idea of his own moral character, especially if the subject be of a moral nature, and have the most distant relation to religion. In this case, the greatest artifice attention, and address will not be sufficient to

to conceal every circumstance that has a connection with *feelings*, and *dispositions of mind*.

Now the writers of the New Testament were very evidently men of no art or cunning whatever. Except St. Paul, they must have been men of very plain understandings; and though not illiterate, yet some of them were barely capable of expressing themselves with propriety upon necessary occasions. Now that men of this character should even think of, or attempt, and much less should actually carry on, and succeed in a scheme of such complicated imposture as the history of Christ and of the apostles must be, if it were not founded in truth, is altogether incredible. In fact, this would be more miraculous than any thing that these writers relate concerning themselves, or their master.

On the contrary, we cannot but see, in the writings of the Evangelists, the plainest marks of a genuine love of truth, and of a disposition the farthest in the world from a design to deceive and impose upon others, even for their good. It is hardly possible to read their writings with attention, without imbibing something of their excellent spirit, feeling something of their ardent love

love of virtue, their zeal to promote the best interests of mankind, their strong attachment to their lord and master, their reverence for God, and devotedness to his will.

The writers of the New Testament have not had the art, nor do they seem to have had the disposition to conceal their own failings, or the objections that were made to the character or pretensions of their master; but they relate incidents of this kind with as little disguise, and as great simplicity, as they do any other parts of their history. Can it be thought that any friend of the Apostle Peter would have invented the disgraceful story of his cowardly desertion of his master, or that any friend of James and John would have mentioned their ambitious views, and the mortifying reproof which was given them by Jesus on that account?

There is not in any of the Evangelists one direct encomium on any of the apostles, or even on their master himself. The very high opinion which we cannot help forming of his character, from the perusal of their writings, is collected intirely from *facts, discourses, and incidents* indirectly mentioned; and men who had been much solicitous about their character and reputation

tion in the world, would hardly have trusted to this. Nothing is more common in antient heathen writers than direct encomiums on their friends, their patrons, and even on themselves. This is even the case with writers of the greatest ingenuity, and the best understanding, who might have been thought to have perceived the folly of such excessive vanity. But the whole narrative of the evangelical historians shews them to have been men altogether void of art or design, men who wrote from their memory only, and who were, indeed, little capable of framing *a cunningly devised fable*. Upon the whole, there are no writings in the world that have so many internal characters of truth.

The very *character of Jesus Christ* is so exceedingly unlike any other character whatever in the whole history of mankind, there is something in it so remarkably great and extraordinary, especially such an amazing mixture of dignity and condescension, that we cannot suppose that such men as the Evangelists should have conceived it, or have supported it so uniformly as they have done, on a great variety of occasions. The *fact* demonstrates that they must have had an *original* to copy after. In this case they

they must have written from their memories, and not from imagination.

I would not scruple to appeal to any person, whose moral sentiments have not been perverted, whether he can possibly reconcile the character of Christ, the doctrines which he taught, and his general conduct, with that of an enthusiast or an impostor, and consequently whether his history does not on this account bear internal marks of truth. He taught and laboriously inculcated the precepts of the purest morality. He did not puzzle his hearers with subtle distinctions in morals, but insisted chiefly upon great and general principles, as the love of God, the love of mankind, and universal purity of heart, which are calculated to form a complete character, adapted to every station and condition in life; and he more especially enforced those virtues which are the least ostentatious, but the most essential to true greatness and excellence of character, viz. the forgiveness of injuries, humility, contentment, and resignation to the will of God.

He never consulted his own ease or pleasure, but constantly laboured and felt for others, going about doing good to the souls and bodies of men. He spared neither

the

the faults of his friends, nor the vices of his enemies, though the former were ever so dear to him, and the latter ever so powerful and inveterate. He discovered the most astonishing wisdom and presence of mind whenever ensnaring questions were put to him. He sought no worldly emoluments or honours, but persisted in a course of life which rendered him in the highest degree obnoxious to those who were in power; and when he deemed the great purpose of his useful life to be accomplished, he no longer secreted himself from the malice of his persecutors, but in a firm belief, and with a peremptory declaration, that he should rise to the most distinguished greatness, and that he should raise all his disciples and friends to similar honours in a future life, he submitted, with inimitable calmness and composure, to a most cruel and ignominious death.

If there be any truth in history, all this, and much more than this, was unquestionably *fact*. Now, what is there in human nature, or in the history of mankind, that can lead us to imagine that the man who could act this part should solemnly assert that he was commissioned by God to do it, without really having such a commission.

A good

A good man will immediately say, if divine interpositions be possible in themselves, and if God has ever spoken by man, Jesus Christ must certainly have been the man ; and an intelligent person may perceive that the time in which he lived was the most proper time for his appearance. The man whose life and conversation is agreeable to the gospel, and who feels that he enjoys the advantages of his being and condition to the greatest perfection in consequence of it, must feel what will be to him the most irresistible evidence that the gospel proceeds from the giver of every good and perfect gift. *He has the witness in himself, and has peace and joy in believing.*

The discourses of our Lord before his death are certainly altogether unaccountable upon the supposition of his being an impostor. They discover the greatest sense of personal dignity and importance, the most perfect goodness and benevolence of heart, the most tender affection to his immediate followers, and the strongest sympathy with them under a prospect of the consternation into which they would be thrown by his approaching death ; and yet, though he endeavoured to suggest the most proper and effectual considerations to encourage

courage and support them under so severe a trial, he is careful to give them no hopes of any advancement or happiness in this world, but only in those mansions which he was going to prepare for them, after they should be so hated of all men, that he who killed them should think that he did God service. With what view could an impostor be supposed to talk in this strain, or what could a few illiterate men expect to gain by supporting the pretensions of a man who wanted to impose upon all the world, and who, after being prosecuted as a criminal, was condemned and crucified?

In the discourses of Christ we perceive a character and manner, in several respects, peculiar to himself, even much more so than that of Socrates in the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon. It is even considerably different from that of Moses, or any of the antient prophets, which a Jew, who had invented, would probably have imitated. This style and manner being so truly original, has, certainly, the appearance of being copied from real life. Besides, the discourses of Christ are not general declamations on the subject of virtue and vice, but are accompanied with many circumstances

circumstances relating to particular persons, times, and places, which a person who wrote from imagination would never have thought of, or at least would not have hazarded.

The manner in which Christ and his apostles proposed and enforced the evidences of their mission, affords a very strong presumptive argument that they were no impostors. They generally exhibited their proofs without the least comment upon them, leaving them to produce their own natural effect upon the mind of the unprejudiced observer. At other times they plainly and peremptorily assert their commission from God, simply appealing to the miracles which they wrought, or to ancient allowed prophecies in favour of their pretensions; never reasoning about the force of them, or of their own accord starting and obviating objections, though they never declined giving plain and satisfactory answers to all that were proposed to them.

On the other hand, impostors, conscious of their having no satisfactory proof of what they pretend to be, never fail to make a great parade of the little seeming evidence which they can venture to alledge, they are quick sighted to foresee, and ready to

to obviate every objection to which they can make any plausible reply, and they artfully evade such as they cannot answer. Such was the conduct of Mohammed, as a person of any tolerable discernment may perceive in reading the Koran, and the very reverse was the conduct of Christ and his apostles, as must be obvious to any person who reads the Gospels and the book of Acts.

Upon the whole we cannot but conclude that the Evangelical history has all the *air* and the usual *characteristics* of truth, and that men circumstanced as the writers of the New Testament were, should have written as they have done, without writing from known facts, is altogether incredible, and the whole history of mankind can exhibit nothing parallel to it.

## P A R T V.

THE EVIDENCE OF REVEALED RELIGION  
FROM PROPHECY.

THE last course of arguments which I shall produce in favour of the Jewish and christian revelations is that which is derived from prophecy, which is of a mixed nature, depending in part upon the testimony of the friends of revelation that such prophecies were delivered, and upon credible history that they have been fulfilled. In some cases, however, it is a matter of public notoriety that the books which contain the prophecies were extant long before the events to which it is asserted that they correspond ; so that this argument borrows no aid from the testimony of the friends of revelation only.

It must be acknowledged that God only can foresee, and with certainty foretel future events, at least such as are very remote, and which depend upon causes which did not exist, or which could not be known by

by man to exist, at the time when they were foretold. It is not necessary, however, that the event should correspond to the prophecy so exactly, as that it might have been distinctly described before it came to pass. For in how dark and obscure a manner soever the prophecy be expressed, it will be sufficiently manifest that it came from God, if, after the event, the correspondence between them be so great, that human foresight could not have described it in such a manner, and if it be highly improbable, or impossible, that it should have been described in such a manner at random. But many prophecies recorded in the scriptures were as intelligible before as after the event, and yet they did not at all contribute to their own accomplishments, by inducing the friends of revelation to exert themselves, in order to bring about the thing foretold ; the event being produced by natural and foreign causes.

Of the many prophecies which are recorded in the books of scripture, I shall only mention a few of the more considerable, reciting in the first place, the words of the prediction, and then relating from history the corresponding events.

## SECTION I.

*Prophecies relating to various nations which had connections with the Jews.*

THE prophecies concerning the posterity of Abraham by ISHMAEL, have been remarkably fulfilled ; and the present state of the Arabs, who are chiefly descended from Ishmael, are an attestation of their truth and divinity.

Several of these predictions imply that the posterity of Ishmael should be numerous ; as Gen. xvi. 6.—12. *And the angel of the Lord said unto Hagar, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, and it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael, and he will be a wild man ; his hand will be against every man, and every mans hand against him, and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.* To Abraham also God said, Gen. xxi. 13. *And also of*

*of the son of the bond woman will I make a nation, because he is of thy seed.* In several other places the prophecy concerning Ishmael being a great nation is repeated; as Gen. xxi. 20, with the additional circumstances of his begetting *twelve princes*.

Now all these particulars have been remarkably fulfilled. The descendants of Ishmael were a considerable nation in very early times, and under Mohammed and his successors, the Arabs extended their conquests over a very considerable part of the world. All the northern coasts of Africa abound with Arabs, Palestine is now almost entirely occupied by them; they also still retain their antient seats, and are as numerous there as ever.

It was said that Ishmael should be a *wild man*, and the Arabs are wild and intractable even to a proverb. It was said that *his hand should be against every man, and every mans hand against him*, and it is well known that the Arabs, and, probably, *the Arabs only*, of all the nations of the world, have constantly lived in a state of hostility with all mankind; many of them subsisting by plundering their neighbours, and the travellers and caravans which are obliged to pass through any part of their coun-

try ; and besides this, their different clans and chiefs are almost always at war with one another.

It seems to be intimated, by Ishmael's *dwelling in the midst of all his brethren*, that his posterity should *continue* to dwell among them, and to subsist as a separate nation, notwithstanding this state of constant hostility ; and it is truly remarkable, that, though the conquest of Arabia has been attempted by almost all the great empires which have bordered upon them, it has never yet been subdued ; and no nation ever made the attempt without repenting of it ; having met with nothing but disgrace and loss. This was most remarkably the case in the time of Trajan, the most warlike of all the Roman emperors, and, when the empire was in its greatest strength.

The destruction of **NINEVEH**, the greatest and most flourishing city in the world while it stood, and the capital of the Assyrian empire, which subdued the ten tribes, and carried them captive, was distinctly and peremptorily foretold by the prophet Nahum, probably about the time of the Babylonish captivity, and in about an hundred and thirty years after that great empire was conquered, and the capital of

it destroyed by the Medes and Babylonians.

BABYLON succeeded Nineveh in power and splendor, and Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon conquered the Jews, and carried them into captivity; yet long before this event, and even before the Babylonians made any great figure among the nations, the utter ruin of their city and empire was foretold. The prophecies concerning it are long and circumstantial, and the description that is given of the condition to which it should be reduced corresponds most exactly to several successive stages of it; and the whole prophecy is completely verified at this day.

The destruction of Babylon is foretold in general terms by Isaiah xxi. 9, and by Jeremiah 1. 17, 18, and li. 8. The time of this event was fixed by Jeremiah, who wrote at the time that the Babylonian empire was in its greatest strength and glory. *Jer. xxv. 11, 12. Those nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years, and it shall come to pass, that when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, says the Lord.*

The conquests of Cyrus, who besieged and took Babylon, were distinctly foretold

by Isaiah ; and that great conqueror is even mentioned by name, Is. xlvi. 1. &c. We have also an account of both those nations which joined in the conquest of Babylon, Is. xxi. 2. *Go up O Elam, Besiege O Media* ; and also in Jeremiah, li. 11, *The Lord hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes ; for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it.*

The very manner in which the city was taken seems to have been alluded to in Isaiah, xliv. 27, *That says to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers.* Also in Jeremiah, l. 28, *A drought is upon her waters, and they shall be dried up*, and again, li. 36, *I will dry up her seas, and make her springs dry.* For the stratagem that Cyrus made use of to take the place was to divert the course of the river, and make his army enter the city, through the midst of which it had flowed, by its channel, which was then left dry.

The prophecies in which the utter destruction of Babylon is foretold are remarkably emphatical, and the accomplishment of them has been no less remarkably exact. Is. xiii. 19.—22. *And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom.*

dom and Gomorrha. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there, neither shall the shepherds make their fold there, but wild beasts of the deserts shall lye there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there; and the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces; and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

Also 14, 22, 23. For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name and remnant, and son and nephew, saith the Lord. I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts. Jer. 1. 9, &c. For lo I will raise, and cause to come up against Babylon, an assembly of great nations from the North country, and they shall set themselves in array against her. From thence she shall be taken. Because of the wrath of the Lord, it shall not be inhabited; but it shall be wholly desolate. Every one that goeth by Babylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all her plagues. For it is the land of graven images, and they are mad upon

on their idols. Therefore, the wild beasts of the desert, with the wild beasts of the island (that is, foreign wild beasts, not natives of the country) shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein, and it shall be no more inhabited for ever, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation.

History shews the full accomplishment of these, and many other very circumstantial prophecies concerning the destruction of Babylon. This great city never recovered the blow which it received from Cyrus; for the river never returned to its old channel; and the neighbouring country becoming marshy, it soon became a very disagreeable situation, and in time not habitable. The destruction of the *idols* of Babylon had been very particularly foretold, and it was fully accomplished by Xerxes, who returning defeated, and disappointed from Greece, wreaked his vengeance upon Babylon, taking its treasures, and destroying all its idols, which the Persians held in abhorrence. *Is. xxi. 9.* *Babylon is fallen, is fallen, and all the graven images of her Gods he has broken to the ground.* *xlvi. 1.* *Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle.* *Jer. l. 2.* *Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Mero-*  
*dach*

Each is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces. li. 44, &c. And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he has swallowed up. The same circumstance is repeated afterwards, and it was fulfilled when Cyrus restored to the Jews the vessels of gold and silver, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple of Jerusalem, and had lodged in the temple of Bel.

The gradual desolation of Babylon, till it came to that state of utter destruction, which is described by the prophets, is truly remarkable. Diodorus Siculus, who wrote a little before the time of Christ, says that the buildings were then ruined and decayed, a small part of it only being inhabited, and the rest of the inclosure employed in tillage. Pliny, who wrote in the first century after Christ, says that Babylon was reduced to solitude; being exhausted by the neighbourhood of Seleucia, which had been built upon the Tigris, not very far from it. Pausanias, who wrote about the middle of the second century, says that of Babylon the greatest city that the sun ever saw, there was nothing remaining but the walls; and Lucian, who wrote

wrote about the same time, says that in a little time it would be sought for and not be found, like Nineveh. In the time of Jerom, who lived in the fourth century, the whole inclosure of the walls of Babylon was actually converted into a chace for keeping wild beasts, and was used for that and no other purpose by many of the kings of Persia. At length even the walls of Babylon, so much celebrated for their height and strength, were demolished; but whether by the Saracens, who conquered that country, is not known.

We find no mention made of Babylon for many centuries after this; but Benjamin, a Jew of Tudela, who travelled into that country, about seven hundred years ago, says that there then remained some of the ruins of Babylon, particularly of Nebuchadnezzar's palace, but that people were afraid to go into the place, on account of the serpents and scorpions with which it swarmed: At present it is not agreed among travellers where the great city of Babylon stood.

The prophecies concerning TYRE were, likewise, exceedingly numerous, referring to several successive periods in the history of that great commercial city; and they have

have all been remarkably fulfilled. I shall only mention the last of them, as it corresponds to the present state of Tyre. It was delivered by Ezekiel, who prophesied during the time of the Babylonish captivity. Ez. xxvi. 3, &c. *Thus says the Lord God, Behold I am against thee O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up, and they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea; for I have spoken it saith the Lord God.* The same circumstance is repeated afterwards, v. 14, *I will make thee like the top of a rock; thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more, for I the Lord have spoken it, saith the Lord God;* and again, v. 21, *I will make thee a terror, and thou shalt be no more. Though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord God.*

If we trace the history of this great city, we shall find that it suffered so much in consequence of several conquests, that there is not now the least trace of the ancient city; and that which was afterwards built upon.

upon an island, and was called the *new city*, is now a heap of ruins, and is only visited by a few fishermen. Parvillerius a Jesuit, whom Huetius, who was acquainted with him, calls a very candid man, and who resided ten years in Syria, said that when he approached the ruins of Tyre, and beheld the rocks stretched forth to the sea, and the great stones scattered up and down on the shore, made clean and smooth by the sun, the waves, and the winds, and of no use but for the drying of fishermen's nets, many of which happened to be at that time spread upon them, the prospect brought to his mind the prophecies of Ezekiel above mentioned.

The fulfillment of prophecies concerning EGYPT is also very remarkable. They corresponded to several successive periods of its history, and the last of them is completely verified in the present state of that once great and noble, but now enslaved and miserable country. After the desolation of that land, and the captivity of the people by Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel prophesied, xxix. 14, 15, that *it should be a base kingdom. It shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations; for I will diminish them, that*

that they shall no more rule over the nations. xxx. 12, 13. I will sell the land into the hand of the wicked, and I will make the land waste, and all that is therein by the hand of strangers ; and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt.

History shews that, from that time to the present, Egypt has never had a prince of its own ; but has been successively under the power of the Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Saracens, Mam-luks, and Turks.

## S E C T I O N II.

### *Prophecies relating to the MESSIAH.*

**A**LMOST the whole of the JEWISH HISTORY was the subject of exceedingly clear and distinct prophecies. The multitudes that should descend from Abraham were repeatedly foretold to that patriarch ; the different fates of Esau and Jacob were foretold to Isaac ; and the condition of each of the twelve tribes was the subject

subject of the prophecy of Jacob when he lay on his death bed, and also of that of Moses. The duration of their state of bondage in Egypt was made known to Abraham, and a great number of particular events were foretold by several prophets in every period of their history to the Babylonish captivity, which Jeremiah foretold would last seventy years ; and so long, and no longer, it did continue, from the first captivity under Jehoiakim, to the return of the Jews under Cyrus.

But those prophecies in which we are most interested, as Christians, are those which relate to the **MESSIAH** ; whose coming was kept in view from the first of the communications of God to mankind, to the suspension of prophecy under Malachi.

As Christ and his apostles assert that all these prophecies are fulfilled, or to be fulfilled under him, it becomes us the more to study them, and to trace the correspondence between the prophecies and the events. I shall therefore collect into one view the principal circumstances relating to the Messiah, which are referred to by the prophets of the Old Testament, and which are known to correspond to the history of Christ.

We

We learn from these prophecies, that the Jews had reason to expect the appearance of a very glorious person, by means of whom both themselves and the rest of the world would receive very great advantages, of a spiritual nature; that he would make his appearance in mean circumstances, and though he should lead a humble and exemplary life, working benevolent miracles, he should be rejected, and put to death; but that his death would be a principal means of promoting the great end of his coming, namely the putting away of sin, or the reformation of the world; that after this state of humiliation and suffering, he should triumph over all his enemies, and establish a kingdom, which should extend over the whole world, and last to the end of time. This person, who, in the prophecies, is called *Shiloh* and *Messiah*, was to be a descendant of Abraham and David, to be born at Bethlehem, and to be preceded by a person resembling Elijah, to prepare his way. Lastly, he was to make his appearance while the second temple of the Jews was standing, and about five hundred years after the time of Ezra.

The following passages from the Old Testament scriptures, among many others, seem to describe, or allude to, such a person as this ; some of them referring to one circumstance, some to another, and some to several of them at the same time.

Gen. xlix. 10. *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between the feet untill Shiloh come, and to him shall the gathering of the people be.* Here is an evident prophecy of some person, to whom the people should be gathered, and who was to make his appearance when the sceptre had departed, or was departing from Judah. Now Christ was born about the time when the Jews became subject to the Romans, their country being reduced into the form of a province of the Empire ; so that they lost the power of inflicting the punishment of death, of which they had not been deprived before, or, at least, for any length of time, though they had been tributary to several other nations ; but after the death of Herod, they lost it intirely, and finally. This prophecy may also have a reference to the sovereignty departing from the other tribes before that period.

If. xi. 1. *And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow*

grow out of his roots, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of council and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord, &c. and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked, v. 10. And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign to the people. To it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious. In this prophecy there is evidently announced to us a person who was to descend from Jesse, or David, whose authority was to extend not only over the Jews, but over the Gentiles also.

That the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, should derive great advantage from the coming of the Messiah, was not only the meaning of the promise of God to Abraham, that *in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed*; but it seems to be more especially alluded to in Ps. ii. 7, 8, which was always understood by the Jews as referring to the Messiah. *The Lord hath said unto me; Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.* The conversion of the Gentiles is more especially

especially promised, If. xlix. 6. *And he said it is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel, I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth.*

The following prophecy of Jeremiah contains clear prediction of the Messiah, as to descend from David, though it probably refers to some more glorious display of his power than has yet been exhibited, xxii. 5. *Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgement and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.* The same thing is also repeated Jer. xxxiii. 14, &c. *Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel, and to the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the branch of righteousness to grow up unto David, and he shall execute judgement and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely, and this is the name wherewith he*

he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness. For thus saith the Lord, David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel.

Micah v. 2. But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall be come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she who travelleth hath brought forth. Then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand, and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide. For now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. This prophecy led all the Jews to expect that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem; and this was exactly accomplished, for Mary was delivered of Jesus at that place, to which she and her family had repaired, in order to be enrolled, though her habitation was at Nazareth in Galilee.

That Christ should reside chiefly in Galilee seems, also, to have been the subject of a prophecy. For at a time when that country was grievously harrassed by the king of Assyria, just before the captivity of

of the ten tribes, Isaiah delivered the following prophecy, ix. i. *Though he lightly afflicted the land of Zabulon, and the land of Napthali, he shall greatly honour her, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light ; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.* For thus, as the learned Joseph Mede has shewn, this passage ought to have been translated.

The character, and humiliation of Christ, with several circumstances relating to his life and death, are plainly alluded to by Isaiah, in the following passages, lii. 13. *Behold my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee, his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men. So shall be sprinkle many nations, the kings shall shut their mouths at him ; for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider,* liii. 1, &c. *Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed. For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him,*

him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised, and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath born our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one from his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all, i. e. probably, as upon the scapegoat under the law, which was not hurt, but dismissed into the wilderness, to represent the intire removal, or forgiveness of their sins. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgement, and who shall declare his generation; for he was cut out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, neither

ther was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear (or take away) their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare (or took away) the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

It is impossible to find any character, or history, to which this prophecy corresponds, but that of Christ; and in him the whole of it was completely fulfilled; though there are some difficulties with respect to some particular passages, which are variously rendered by different translators.

The prosperity of the Jews under some future king was clearly foretold by the prophet Zechariah ix. 9, and even the circumstance of his riding upon an ass was probably alluded to by him. *Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion, shout O daughter of Jerusalem.*

*Jerusalem. Behold thy king cometh unto thee. He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.*

When the second temple was built by those who turned from the Babylonish captivity, the old men, who remembered the temple of Solomon, wept, to see the difference; the latter temple being so mean in comparison of the former. But to comfort them, the prophet Haggai says, ii. 4. *Be strong O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord, and be strong all ye people of the land; for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts. It is yet a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. Silver is mine, and gold is mine. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.*

This prophecy limits the coming of Christ, whose presence made the second temple more truly glorious than that of Solomon, to some time before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, when that temple was levelled with the ground.

But the time in which the Messiah should make his appearance was most distinctly foretold by the prophet Daniel, who limited it to seventy weeks after the decree of the kings of Persia to rebuild Jerusalem, ix. 24, &c. *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision, and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy.* Know, therefore, and understand; that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks; the streets shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

Though there are several methods of computing these *seventy weeks* (every day of which is agreed to stand for a year) yet it is plain, that, according to any of them, that term must have expired about the time of Christ. Accordingly we find that there was, in fact, about that time, a general expectation among the Jews, and through all the East; of the appearance of some great prince, and reformer of religion.

That

That some person would be sent to *prepare the way for the Messiah*, seems to have been foretold with sufficient clearness, in the following prophecies. We also see in them, that he was to resemble the prophet *Elias*; and it appears, that such a person was expected by the Jews about the same time.

*Isaiah iv. 3. The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

This prophecy immediately follows another, concerning the captivity of the Jews by the Babylonians, and is introduced by the following animated consolation, which was, no doubt, written under a prospect of the happy state of things which was to be introduced by the Messiah, v. 1, 2. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her*

sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, &c.

Mal. iii. 1, &c. Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in. Behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts, iv. 2. Unto you that fear my name shall the son of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings, &c. v. 5, 6. Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to their children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

These are but a small part of the prophecies which pretty plainly refer to Christ in the Old Testament; and though some of them, I doubt not, are to have a much more complete accomplishment than they have hitherto received, yet so many of the particulars are already fulfilled, as abundantly prove, that those prophets wrote by divine inspiration; no other than God being able to describe so distant an event with such exactness. These prophecies ought certainly to excite our closest attention to a character so distinguished before hand, and rendered

rendered so conspicuous, as we may say, even before he made his appearance in the world; and it should concur with other proofs, to strengthen our faith in the divine mission of Christ, and the divinity of his religion.

## S E C T I O N     III.

*Prophecies in the New Testament.*

THE same spirit of prophecy which attended every stage of the *Jewish* dispensation, has no less distinguished the *Christian*, which is to be considered as the continuation, and completion of the same general scheme.

The entire overthrow of the Jewish nation, and the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, with many remarkable circumstances preceding and attending them, were expressly foretold by Christ. So distinct was his foreknowledge of the great calamities that were to come upon his nation, that he was exceedingly moved

and affected with the consideration of them, and he always expressed himself with the greatest tenderness and compassion whenever he mentioned them ; as Mat. xxiii.

37, 38. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee ; how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate.*

Upon his approaching Jerusalem for the last time, it is said, Luke xix. 41, &c. that when he came near, he beheld the city, and wept over it ; saying, *If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee ; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*

When he was going to be crucified, the expectation even of his own immediate suffering did not so far engross his thoughts, but that he felt the most lively compassion on

on the prospect of the future miseries of his countrymen. For, being followed by a great company of people, Luke xxii. 27, &c. and, of women, who bewailed and lamented him, Jesus, turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the rocks, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry.

But the most circumstantial of the prophecies of our Lord, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, was delivered to his disciples, when they desired him to attend to the magnificence of that celebrated structure, as they were sitting in the full view of it, on the mount of Olives. He immediately replied, Mat. xxiv. 2. *See ye not all these things; Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down;* and this was even literally fulfilled about forty years after, when the city was taken by Titus, to the great regret of that

Roman general, who would gladly have preserved so glorious a structure.

Several things that preceded and accompanied this dreadful overthrow of the Jews were distinctly recited by our Lord, as signals to his disciples to flee from the place, in order to escape the impending calamities. For when they asked him *when those things should be*, he replied, Mat. xxiv. 4. *Take heed that no man deceive you, for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places.* Now, according to the testimony of Josephus, and other historians, all these things did, in a very remarkable manner, precede the destruction of Jerusalem. Indeed the whole of that work of Josephus, concerning *the wars of the Jews*, is the clearest, and most unexceptionable evidence of the fulfilment of our Saviour's prophecies. The particulars of the prophecies and the event have been compared by several chris-

tian writers, but more especially by bishop Newton, Dr. Lardner, and Mr. Jortin.

Our Lord also mentions the persecution of his followers, as what would precede that event Matt. xxiv. 9. *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations, for my name's sake; and then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and hate one another; but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

In connection with this persecution and dispersion of his disciples, our Lord foretold that his religion would be preached in all the *world*, meaning, probably, the Roman empire, before this great catastrophe; and this appears from history to have been accomplished. Mat. xxiv. 14. *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.*

The more immediate signal for the christians to flee out of the country was the appearance of Roman armies, with their standards, and images (which were held in abomination by the Jews) in the holy land of Judea and in Jerusalem, Mat. xxiv. 15. *When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet,*

phet, standing in the holy place (who so readeth let him understand) then let them who be in Judea flee into the mountains. Let him who is on the house top not come down, to take any thing out of his house ; neither let him who is in the field return back to take his cloaths. And wo unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days. But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, nor on the sabbath-day ; for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be.

The obscurity which there is in the terms of the first part of this prediction in Matthew is, in a great measure removed by the plainer expressions, corresponding to them, in Luke xxi. 20. *And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.* Then let them who are in Judea, flee to the mountains, and let them who are in the midst of it depart out ; and let not them who are in the countries enter thitherinto ; for these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But wo unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days ; for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive.

*captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*

In these last words it is intimated, that the calamities of the Jews are to have an end, and that they are to be once more restored to the possession of Jerusalem. And from this, and other prophecies to the same purpose, we learn that this great event is to take place, when the gospel shall have been preached throughout the whole world, and when some at least of all nations shall be converted to the profession of it. The apostle Paul says, Rom. xi. 25, *I would not, Brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, that blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.*

At the time that our Saviour delivered this prophecy, there was far from being any appearance of its being accomplished. The Jews had been a long time in subjection to the Romans, whose empire then extended over almost all the known world, and was in its greatest strength; so that it could not have

have been imagined that so inconsiderable a people as the Jews were would ever think of opposing them, and much less that they should hold out, till they were reduced to such extreme distress as our Lord has described. Still less would any man, not conscious of divine inspiration, have ventured to foretel such a circumstance, as the circumvallation of Jerusalem, when, if they were reduced by the Romans, the conquest might have been effected by many methods more compendious than this.

Besides, there was not in our Saviour's time any example of a country being reduced to so great desolation by the Romans, and of so complete a dispersion of the inhabitants, as that which befel the Jews. The Romans were, in general, merciful conquerors, so that the state of almost all the countries that were subject to them was considerably improved by that means.

Still less was it likely that so noble a structure as the *temple*, which was probably the most sumptuous and magnificent building in the world, would have been demolished, either by the Romans, who would have been proud of such a monument of their victory, or by the Jews, who had the most superstitious veneration for it; and it was.

was so situated, as to be in no danger of being destroyed by a casual fire, or any other accident. But, notwithstanding this, our Lord, peremptorily pronounced, that these things, improbable as they must have appeared, would not fail to come to pass in that very generation Mat. xxiv. 34, &c. *Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

The successful propagation of the gospel, notwithstanding the opposition it was to meet with, and the grievous persecutions of those who adhered to it; also the deplorable corruption of christianity, and the restoration of it after that corruption, in a very distant age, were all the subjects of prophecy by our Lord and his apostles; and most of them were events, which no man could have foreseen, or expected, at the time in which the predictions were delivered.

The success of the gospel is certainly to be understood by what is said in the antient Jewish prophecies concerning the great extent and glory of the Messiah's kingdom; but our Lord himself must have had a more particular view to it in several of his parables,

bles, as in that concerning the small grain of *mustard seed*, which grew into a great tree; the small quantity of *leaven* which leavened the whole lump, and many others, by which he professedly represents the wonderful spread of his gospel; and it must have been with the fullest assurance of this event, that he solemnly commissioned his disciples to *go and preach the gospel to every creature*.

It is not improbable, but that our Lord might speak prophetically when he called himself the *light of the world*, and said, *No man cometh to the Father but by me. No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him, &c.* If these declarations were meant to extend beyond the time and country in which they were delivered, the history of mankind affords a striking proof of the fulfilment of them; and the present state of the world makes it exceedingly probable, that no people will ever attain to just and useful conceptions of God, &c. but by the gospel, and that by this means all nations will, in due time, acquire them.

That there was to be a great *corruption of christianity* was expressly foretold not only in the book of Revelation, in which

the

the rise, progres, and utter destruction of some great antichristian power are most certainly described, but also in other writings of the apostles, and especially those of St. Paul as 2 Thess. ii. 1, &c. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

The coming of this antichristian power, he farther says, v. 9, is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lye.

This apostle represents this corruption as having begun even in his time, though that

that monstrous antichristian power could not receive its full establishment till some other power, which was then in the way (by which he probably meant the Roman empire) should be removed. But whenever it should be established, he expressly foretells its utter destruction, v. 6, &c.

*And now ye know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time; for the mystery of iniquity does already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.*

The particulars of this great corruption of christianity are more distinctly expressed by the apostle Paul in his first epistle to Timothy iv. 1. *Now the spirit speaketh expressly, that, in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created, to be received with thanksgiving, of them which believe and know the truth.*

It is impossible not to perceive in these prophecies, especially if they be compared with

with others in the book of Daniel, and of the Revelation, the plain characters of the *church of Rome*; allowing for the obscurity of many of the phrases by which the Papal usurpations on the rights of God and man are here expressed. These prophecies have been fully accomplished, the Popish corruptions and usurpations having proceeded almost without interruption, for more than fourteen hundred years.

That so simple a religion as the christian should have been subject to such dreadful corruption must have appeared improbable, at the time of its first promulgation; the like not having happened to the Jewish religion, or, indeed, to any other religion under heaven. And yet when the corruption was established, and had been supported by all the temporal powers under heaven, for the space of many centuries, and was intimately incorporated with the civil constitutions of those states, its general restoration to its primitive purity must have appeared much more improbable; and yet such progress has been already made in this great work, that there can be no doubt but that, in due time, the whole prophecy will be completed, and christianity be once more what it originally was.

## P A R T VI.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE EVIDENCE OF  
SEVERAL MIRACLES WHICH HAVE BEEN  
SAID TO HAVE BEEN WROUGHT FOR  
OTHER PURPOSES THAN THE CONFIRMA-  
TION OF THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN  
REVELATIONS.

WE shall be much confirmed in our belief of the miracles of Moses and of Christ, and of the truth of their religions, if we compare the evidence which has been brought for them, with that which is alledged in favour of other miracles. For miracles have been pleaded in favour of heathens, Mohammedans, and the church of Rome; but the evidence which is alledged in their favour, though it has been boasted of by modern unbelievers, as equal, and even superior to what has been pleaded of the miracles of Moses and of Christ is exceedingly

ceedingly defective; if there be any propriety in the rules which I have already laid down for ascertaining the value of human testimony

The number of false miracles which have gained credit in the world, posterior to those of Christ and his apostles, are, in some measure, an evidence of their truth. Mankind are easily led by analogy from one thing to another; so that having been compelled to admit the evidence of some miracles, they would more easily admit that of others, in any respects similar to them (as their being wrought by the same kind of persons, and for similar purposes) upon much more slender evidence; whereas if nothing had existed of the like nature before them, the evidence of which was indisputable, the later miracles would have gained no credit at all; so that the credit which they have obtained is a kind of proof that something better authenticated had taken place before them. In like manner spurious Gospels, &c. are some proof that there were *genuine ones* prior to them.

It may truly be said of all miracles, not Jewish or christian, that they were either not published to the world till long after the time they were said to have been performed,

formed, or not in the places in which they were said to have happened, or they were suffered to pass without examination, because they coincided with the favourite opinions and prejudices of those to whom they were reported; or that it was the interest of priests or magistrates to favour the deceit. None of these miracles were performed in places where they must have been the most wanted, viz. in the presence of unbelievers; and besides, they were of such a nature, as could answer no good end whatever, many of them a bad one, and the rest were whimsical and ridiculous, such as, we cannot but think, must have been altogether unworthy of the character of the supreme being. And yet, with respect even to the popish miracles, which are only pretended to have been wrought in countries in which it is highly dangerous not only to make any inquiry into them, but even to hint the least suspicion of their truth, Mr. Chubb scruples not to say, that they are better attested than any that are said to have been wrought in the first century, that is, by Christ and the apostles; and the philosophical Mr. Hume expresses himself in a still stronger manner to the same purpose.

The

The pretended miracles of Apollonius Tyanæus have been set upon a level with those of Christ by Hierocles and Philostratus among the antients, and by Mr. Blount among the moderns. I shall therefore give a more particular account of them.

This Apollonius was a Pythagorean philosopher, cotemporary with Christ, and remarkable, as it is said, for his temperance and many other virtues. It is affirmed that he performed many miracles, particularly, transporting himself in the air from one place to another, and even raising the dead. He is also said to have ascended into heaven, and to have appeared to the emperor Alexander.

But it certainly tends to discredit the story, that Apollonius had been dead, or translated, above a hundred years before Philostratus wrote, and that his history was compiled partly from the commentaries of one Damis, which were never published, but given to this writer by the empress Julia, as *secret memoirs*, without any evidence of their being genuine; and partly from the writings of Maximus Æginensis, and Meragenes, the former of whom only wrote a few particulars, and, according to the character given of him by Philostratus himself,

self, was a very fabulous and romantic writer.

It is, indeed, said, that there were public monuments of some of the miracles of Apollonius, but they are also said to have been in distant cities of India and Ethiopia, where no writer pretends to have found them. Some letters of Apollonius are mentioned, but Philostratus owns that they did not relate to any of his miracles, but only to the curiosities of the countries through which he travelled.

The manner in which Philostratus writes gives us but a very indifferent opinion of his own character, and his style is affected and extravagant, full of an ostentation of learning, and shewing a disposition to aggravate every thing that could tend to the reputation of his hero.

Many of the miracles ascribed to Apollonius were said to have been done in secret, or before very few witnesses ; some were self contradictory, and others were evidently vain and foolish ; and not a few of them appear to have been borrowed from the history of the Evangelists.

The occasion of Philostratus's writing seems to have been his desire to ingratiate himself with Julia, the wife of Severus, and

and with Caracalla the succeeding emperor, by detracting from christianity, to which they both had a very great aversion.

Lastly, the story of these miracles presently died away, and the disciples of Appollonius were so few, that there is little reason to believe that he was, in any respect, so extraordinary a person as Philostratus pretended.

As to the *magical rites* of the heathens, nothing could be more wicked or absurd. Nero shewed the most extravagant fondness for this odious and contemptible art, and sent for the most eminent professors of it from all parts of the world ; but the issue of it was his own, and a general conviction of the folly of their pretences.

The emperor Vespasian is said to have cured a blind and a lame man at Alexandria, and this Mr. Hume says is one of the best attested miracles in all profane history. But it may be easily collected from the accounts of the two historians, who mention these miracles (neither of whom it is probable believed in them, and one of them evidently did not) that these extraordinary narrations were very convenient, in order to give weight to the authority of Vespasian, who was newly made emperor.

Mohammed himself did not pretend to any miracle, except the Koran itself; and that this was a divine composition he does not pretend to give any positive proof; but contents himself with appealing to its own excellence, and it was probably superior to the poetical compositions of other Arabians of his time; and this it might very well be, though written by himself or his confidants. In the translation of Mr. Sale, who is allowed to have been a great master of the Arabic language, and who certainly meant to give it all possible advantage, it is, upon the whole, a very mean performance. The style of the Koran cannot be said to be comparable to that of many parts of the Old Testament, which, however, was never alledged as any proof of its divinity.

It does not appear that this only pretended miracle of Mohammed gained him any followers; the propagation of his religion having been owing chiefly to the sword. Moreover, though the Mohammedan religion be very absurd, and unnaturally harsh in some respects, especially in the absolute prohibition of wine, it flatters men with the greatest indulgence in others; every man being allowed four wives, and

as many concubines as he can keep ; and the future rewards of good musselmen are represented as being of a sensual nature. The great advantage which Mohammedanism had over the corrupt christianity of the times in which it was published, was that it asserted the great doctrine of the unity of God, against the Trinitarians ; but in other respects all who profess this religion are slaves to the most abject superstition. And yet Mr. Chubb says, that whether Mohammedanism be a divine revelation, or not, there seems to be a plausible pretence, arising from the circumstances of things, to stamp a divine character upon it.

Of all the Popish miracles, those which have been ascribed to the Abbé Paris are generally allowed to be the most credible. Mr. Hume boasts exceedingly of them, asserting that no where else can there be found such a number of circumstances, agreeing to the corroboration of one fact ; and that nothing can be opposed to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility, or miraculous nature of the events. He even says that those miracles may be said, with some appearance of reason, to surpass those of Christ in evidence and authority, *Philosophical Essays* p. 198, &c. Let

us now consider a few circumstances which our philosopher seems to have overlooked, when he gave his judgment in this case.

At the time when these miracles were said to have been performed, there was a strong and numerous party in France, under the conduct of very able and learned men, who were strongly prepossessed in favour of that cause which those miracles were calculated to support ; and on the first rumour of them, they were eagerly cryed up, and considered as the clear decision of heaven in favour of the Jansenists.

The character of this Abbe was such as makes it highly improbable that any miracle should have been wrought by him, or in his favour. His whole life was a course of the most absurd and painful superstitions. He abridged himself even of the necessaries of life, and was, in fact, accessory to his own death, by refusing proper assistance, and even better nourishment, when he was manifestly drawing near his end, in consequence of his extreme austerities.

By the manner in which Mr. Hume writes upon this subject, one would imagine that these miracles had never been contradicted, and that the evidence for them

them had never been disputed; and yet the fact is, that they were always suspected by most persons who heard of them; that the archbishop of Sens considered twenty-two of them as impostures; that the counsellor Montgeron, who undertook to confute him, gave up seventeen of these pretended cures, and defended only five; that M. Des Voux proved to him that he defended them very ill; that in the judicial proceedings upon the occasion, the falsity of many of these prodigies was demonstrated; that many witnesses absconded to escape examination, that others deposed that their certificates had been falsified, by the addition of circumstances which were not true; that many of the sick persons protested against the account which had been published of their cures; that many of those who had been subject to convulsions confessed to M. De Heraut, the lieutenant of the police, that their convulsions were artificial; that the cures, true or false, were but gradual, and accomplished by several steps; that they were obliged to go nine times at least, and often more, to the tomb of the Abbé; so that the cures might very possibly be either the work of time, of a lively imagination, or of the medicines which they continued

to take ; that by far the greatest number of those who applied for a cure were disappointed ; that it was very unlikely that the assistance of the divine being should not have been obtained but by means of convulsions, swoonings, violent, and sometimes very indecent gestures, which those who applied for a cure made use of ; and lastly, that these miracles entirely ceased when no credit was given to them ; and instead of drawing the Jansenists out of the low reputation into which they were fallen, they only served to make the whole party more ridiculous and contemptible.\*

Mr. Hume also mentions, after the cardinal De Retz, a miracle which was said to have been wrought in Saragossa ; but, by Mr. Hume's own account, the cardinal himself did not believe it.

The last instance I shall mention is one on which Mr. Chubb lays great stress, viz. a miracle said to have been wrought among the Camisards, or the protestants in the South of France, and which he says cannot be distinguished from a real miracle. The principal thing that was exhibited upon this occasion was one Clary, seeming to stand

\* Lettres de Roustan, p. 85, &c.

or dance about in the flames unhurt. The account was published by Mr. Lacy, an English gentleman, who joined the French protestants when they took refuge in England, from the depositions of John Cavalier, a brother of the principal leader of the Camisards, but a person of an infamous character, who afterwards turned papist, and enlisted in the French king's guards.

But M. Le Moine, who answered Mr. Chubb's treatise on miracles, in which this fact was mentioned, having taken some pains to inquire into it, found, upon the testimony of the most unexceptionable witnesses, especially that of one Serres, who had been a member of the privy council of the Camisards, that the whole business was a trick, contrived by themselves, in order to encourage their troops. This person, when near his death, gave a circumstantial account of the manner in which the artifice had been conducted; and the particulars, together with the proofs of the whole discovery, may be seen in M. Le Moine's treatise on miracles, p. 420, &c.

## P A R T VII.

A VIEW OF THE PRINCIPAL OBJECTIONS  
TO THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN REVE-  
LATIONS.

**I**N the preceding sections I have given a general view of the evidence for the truth of the Jewish and Christian revelations, or the reasons which induce me to believe that the divine being has interposed in the affairs of this world, giving mankind laws and admonitions, with such sanctions respecting our future expectations, and especially our expectations after death, as we find an account of in the scriptures; and I presume that such facts have been produced, as cannot be accounted for without supposing that these books contain a true and authentic history.

That testimony so copious, and so particularly circumstanced, given by such numbers of persons, who had the best opportunity of being informed, and who were so far from having any motive to impose upon

on the world, should, notwithstanding, be given to a falsehood, cannot be admitted, without supposing all those persons to have been constituted in a manner quite different from other men. And by whatever method of reasoning we dispute the authenticity of the books of scripture, we may question the genuineness of all antient writings, and invalidate the evidence of all history.

Such known facts of other kinds have also been produced, especially respecting the reception which the pretensions to divine communications by Moses, by Christ, and his apostles have met with, from persons who could have had no motive to admit them, except the fullest conviction of their truth, and also respecting the degrees of religious knowledge possessed by the Jews and christians, who were far from having any peculiar natural advantage for the attainment of it, as cannot be accounted for without the supposition of their having had such divine communications as they pretend to.

Lastly, not only have many remarkable events come to pass agreeable to predictions published in those books, but the *present state* of several considerable cities, of whole

nations, and of the world in general, is such as was exactly described in them several hundred years ago; so that we cannot but have the greatest reason to expect the full accomplishment of all the other predictions, for which we have the same evidence that they came from God, and especially that which is the great object of the whole scheme of revelation, and to which, if we believe it, it behoves us to have constant respect, viz. that Christ will come again to raise the dead, to judge the world, and to give unto every man according to his works.

Notwithstanding this direct and plenary evidence for the truth of the Jewish and christian religions, many persons, who have been extremely prejudiced, and consequently averse to receive them, either overlooking some of the more essential particulars of which it consists, or not fully comprehending it, have started several objections. I shall therefore distinctly mention, and briefly reply to the principal of them, especially such as are thought to be the most plausible, and which have the most weight at present.

## SECTION I.

*Various objections respecting the Old Testament.*

SOME of the most plausible objections that have yet been made to the system of revelation above-mentioned affect the Jewish religion only. It is said to represent the divine conduct in such a light, as is inconsistent with his known attributes of justice and goodness, particularly his express order to destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan, without sparing even innocent children, his command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, and his direction to the children of Israel to borrow of the Egyptians jewels, and other valuable things, without any design to return them.

Before I reply to each of these objections, I shall make a few general observations respecting them all.

To these, and all such like objections, the same general answer may be made as to similar objections to the justice and goodness of God in the natural world, where we see many things which we are not able to reconcile to those principles, as they are rules of human conduct ; and there is no reason to expect that revealed religion should be more free from these objections than natural religion. On the contrary, we might expect, that, if both the dispensations have the same author, they would be so similarly constituted, as to be attended with similar advantages, and similar difficulties. Now we see that, under the government of the same God, the innocent are frequently involved in the same calamities with the guilty ; the laws of nature being so framed, as to be only *in general* favourable to virtue, without making exceptions on account of individuals.

If the vices and follies of a nation, or of its governors, bring war, famine, or pestilence into it, the righteous are not spared ; storms, tempests and earthquakes make no distinction of virtuous or vicious, and innocent children suffer every day in consequence of the profligacy and debauchery of their parents. If, therefore, it be consistent

sistent with the divine attributes to permit war, pestilence, famine, or earthquakes, by which numbers of our race, of all characters, are promiscuously swept away, why might not the same being commission the Israelites utterly to extirpate a nation abandoned, without hope of recovery, to the most abominable idolatries and wickedness. With respect to the divine being, there can be no material difference; and indeed there is very little, in any case, between *appointment*, and *permission*, where there is a sufficient power of prevention. Also, as it is alledged that the inequalities of common providence may be rectified in a future state, the very same may be said with respect to these special providences.

The great object of divine government is the production of happiness; and as we see, in the ordinary dispensations of his providence, that temporal evils are, in many cases, inseparably connected with, and ultimately productive of good, we may presume that every thing to which similar objections may be raised in the course of his extraordinary dispensations will, in the end, be seen to have the same advantages; and then they will stand perfectly clear of all objections. In the mean time, it becomes,

comes us (as we are obliged to do with respect to every thing that we have to complain of in the constitution and government of the natural world) to wait with patience, till we can see farther into the nature and uses of things than we can do at present. The reason why the rules of strict justice and veracity are binding upon us, is because it is the only way in which our mutual happiness, as social beings, can be promoted *by ourselves*. We have seen already, that the most indispensible moral duties are, in fact, *means* to a certain end ; and it is possible that, in some cases, a being of infinite wisdom may gain the same great end by what appears to us to be a deviation from any rules.

However, with respect to the case of the Canaanites, we may, I think, see great wisdom and propriety in their utter extermination, in the manner in which it was accomplished by the Israelites. It might be highly expedient, and even necessary, for the instruction of that age of mankind, that the divine being should make a signal and striking example of a nation so far sunk into idolatry, and corruptions of all kinds, as all the inhabitants of Canaan are said to have been ; and the hand of God would not

not have been so visible in their destruction, and consequently the moral lesson would not have been so striking, and useful, if it had been accomplished by a flood, an earthquake, or any other natural means, as had been already tried in the case of the old world, and of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha; whereas the hand of God could not but appear when the punishment was executed by a people who received an express and manifest commission from him for that purpose; and this could not but be evident, when all the passage of the children of Israel from Egypt to the land of Canaan was conducted by a series of miracles, and when they were assisted by supernatural power in making their conquests. It was like the regular execution of a commission by persons who carried their credentials or warrant along with them.

The particular reasons for the extirpation of the Canaanites are clearly and repeatedly expressed in the books of Moses. Thus, in one place, the settlement of the Israelites in the promised land is said to have been deferred, because the iniquity of the inhabitants was not full; and the Israelites are frequently reminded that the extermination

extermination of the Canaanites, and their own settlement in the country, were appointed by God, not on account of their goodness, but for the wickedness of those people who were driven out before them. It is remarkable that, in all the other wars in which the Israelites might happen to be engaged with their neighbouring nations, they were expressly enjoined to pursue very different and more humane maxims, sparing all except such as were found bearing arms. In this particular case, only, they were expressly commanded to *exterminate utterly*.

That the Israelites were not influenced by the usual passions of conquerors, but acted under an authority which controuled their natural desires is manifest from their not sparing even the cattle, and even refraining to appropriate to themselves the treasure which they found in Jericho, which was the first fruits of their conquests, and to be devoted to God. The Israelites have often been compared to barbarous conquerors and cruel murderers; but let other conquerors and assassins be produced, who refrained from plunder, as these did. That they were not actuated by mere rage and revenge is evident from their having

ing received no particular provocation, not indeed, having had any personal intercourse with the inhabitants of Canaan. Their motives, it is evident, must have been of a very different nature from those of common robbers and murderers, and, in the eye of reason, it is the *motive* that determines the nature of the action.

It is also remarkable that, notwithstanding the passion the Israelites may be supposed to have had for war, which would have been inflamed by the rapidity of their conquests, they were forbidden to extend them beyond the boundaries of the land of Canaan; and the constitution of their government was altogether unsuited to extensive empire.

It would be a sufficient reason for the extermination of the Canaanites by the sword of the children of Israel, if, as is very possible, it was the best method of impressing the minds of the Israelites themselves with a just idea of the heinous nature of idolatry, and to make sufficient provision against their being seduced into the same abominable practices. If their living only in the neighbourhood of idolatrous nations was so unsafe for this people, as their history shews it to have been, what danger would they not have been in,

if they had spared the old inhabitants of Canaan, and suffered them to live unmolested among them.

I would observe, however, that the order to exterminate utterly in the case of the Canaanites ; though expressed in absolute terms, is supposed by some to have been *conditional* in fact, and that their lives were to have been spared upon their submission, and especially on their forsaking idolatry.

This supposition is sufficiently analogous to other threatenings in the scriptures (the nature of which is explained by the prophet Ezekiel xxxiii. 14.) as that of Jonah against the Ninevites. He was commissioned to say that *in forty days Nineveh should be overthrown*, Jonah iii. 4. and yet we see that, upon repentance, that city was spared.

It is plain in fact that the Israelites either did not understand the command to be absolute, or they knowingly transgressed it, even in the best and most flourishing state of their affairs ; for mention is made of the remains of the Canaanitish nations living in subjection to the Israelites even to the times of the kings. 1 Kings ix. 20, 21. *All the people that were left, of the Moabites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which were*

were not of the children of Israel, their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bond service unto this day. It is plain from this passage that, though before the days of David and Solomon, the Israelites could not intirely subdue those nations, they were then wholly reduced, and at the mercy of their conquerors ; and we no where read of their being blamed for the favour they shewed them, as Saul was in the case of the Amalekites, who were reduced by war. We also read Judges i. 28. *It came to pass that when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.* And it must be observed that Uriah, one of David's principal heroes, was a Hittite.

Besides the *reason* and *end* for which the order for the extermination of the Canaanites was given, which was, lest the children of Israel should be inticed by them into idolatry, intirely ceased upon their sub-mission, and abandoning their idol worship.

Lastly, it is pretty clearly inferred that this order was conditional from finding that if the hearts of the Canaanites had not been hardened, to oppose the Israelites, they would

would not have been cut off. Joshua xi. 19, 20. *There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel save the Hivites. For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they might come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses,* i. e. evidently in case of opposition only. As to the Lord's hardening their hearts, there is nothing peculiar in it in this case, and, it will be explained hereafter.

The orders which the Jews had, not to spare even their nearest relations, if they should attempt to seduce them into idolatry, has been made the foundation of the same charge of cruelty, and has also been censured as a persecution on the account of religious principles. But it should be considered, that the very reason for setting apart the Jewish nation to be the theatre of the extraordinary providence of God, respecting the whole world of mankind, which was at that time universally sinking into idolatry, was to secure the belief of the great and important doctrine of *the divine unity*, and universal moral government; and that this, which was the great object both of the religious constitution, and also of

of the civil government of the Hebrews, would have been defeated, if the most effectual provision had not been made for securing to the one true God the allegiance of this one nation, and their adherence to the purity of his worship.

Besides, it being absolutely necessary to the great purposes of the Jewish dispensation, that a special and extraordinary providence should constantly attend that people, making them prosperous and flourishing so long as they preserved the purity of their religion, and involving them in national calamity and distress whenever they departed from it, the Israelites themselves would not have been fairly dealt with, if every possible avenue had not been guarded against the introduction of so destructive an evil. And, after all, we see that, even these seemingly rigorous methods, were not quite sufficient for the purpose; and that the divine being was obliged, as we may say, to teach his useful lessons to the world by the *punishment*, as well as the *prosperity* of his favourite people; but in either of these cases, their *example* was of the same benefit to the world at large.

It should also be considered, that the idolatry of the antient Gentile world, and especially

especially that of the inhabitants of Canaan, was by no means a system of merely speculative *opinions*; but a course of the most atrocious and abominable *practices*, enjoining the cruel murder of numberless innocent children, as well as other human victims, and the most shocking lewdness, together with other vices of the most unnatural and detestable nature. And surely it becomes a wise legislator, to restrain the commission of such destructive vices as these.

As to the case of Abraham, with respect to the command he received to offer his son Isaac, it cannot, I think, be denied, that he who gave life had a right to take it away, and in whatever manner his infinite wisdom should see fit; and if, for the trial of his obedience in so tender a point, he chose to make Abraham himself the instrument of it, instead of a disease, or what we usually call an accident, I do not know that it is inconsistent with any thing that we already know of the divine conduct. Abraham, who had had frequent communications with God, could have no doubt concerning the authority from which the order came; and knowing the divine power and justice, he might be satisfied that, notwithstanding,

withstanding all appearances, neither himself nor his son would be losers by their obedience.

St. Paul says, that Abraham knew that God was even able to raise Isaac from the dead, and indeed it is probable that this was the very thing that Abraham expected; for the promise that was made to him, of being *the father of many nations*, chiefly respected Isaac, *In Isaac shall thy seed be called*. If, therefore, Abraham believed this promise, he must have fully expected, either that God would not permit him to put his son to death, or that he would raise him from the dead; and if he had not firmly believed the former promise, much less would he have regarded this harsh command.

It may also be observed, in order to lessen the difficulty which arises from this part of the scripture history, that the Gentile world was, probably, about this time, falling into the horrid custom of human sacrifices; and that the divine being might chuse to shew, in this instance, that though he had a right to demand such offerings, they were not pleasing to him, and he would not accept of them. Upon all other occasions he is represented as expressing the greatest

greatest abhorrence of such cruel rites, and his highest displeasure against all those nations who practised them. See Lev. xviii. 21. Deut. xviii. 10. Jer. vii. 31. Ez. xvi. 21, xx. 26, 31.

I would observe, farther, that, with respect to ideas of *right* and *equity*, the sentiments of those people who observed any particular fact, and who were to be instructed by it, should be chiefly considered. Now it cannot be pretended that any objection was ever made to God's requiring the sacrifice of Isaac, for the trial of Abraham's faith and obedience, till the present age, which is above four thousand years since the event ; nor can it be made to appear that any bad consequence ever flowed from it.

Though the Israelites left Egypt loaded with the treasures of the country, the ungrateful usage they had met with, and the cruel and unjust servitude to which they had been reduced, and the recompense they were fairly intitled to should be considered, in order to lessen the difficulty which might arise from the account of the method which they took to recover their right. But the word which we render *borrow* also signifies to *require*, or *demand* ; and

and in the situation in which the Egyptians are represented to have been, willing to get rid of the Israelites at any rate, *lest they should all be dead men*, it may easily be imagined, that they would have been as ready to give as to lend them, whatever they should have asked.

It is also said, that when they left the country, it was on a promise to return; but certainly that promise must have been cancelled by the hostile manner in which they were pursued by the Egyptians. Besides the use of stratagems, in order to free men from unjust servitude, is not considered as liable to much objection in the history of human affairs.

It is also objected to this part of the history, that God is said to have *hardened the heart* of Pharaoh, in order that he might do the very things for which he is expressly said to have been punished. But in the language of scripture God is often said to *do*, whatever comes to pass according to the ordinary course of nature and providence; and therefore God's not interposing to soften the heart of Pharaoh, may be all that is meant when he is said to harden it.

Besides it is sufficiently intimated, in the course of the narration, that the heart of

Pharaoh was hardened, not by any proper act of God, but in consequence of its own depravity, and the circumstances he was in. For when the frogs were removed, we read, Exod. viii. 15, that *when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and harkened not unto them, as the Lord had said.* Pharaoh does not seem to have been more infatuated than the rulers of the Jews were, with respect to the murder of Christ; and yet nobody supposes that they did not, in that case act, naturally, or as their own evil dispositions prompted them.

It is said that, by the account of Moses himself, miracles were wrought by the Egyptian magicians, as well as by himself and Aaron; and therefore that his miracles were no proof of a divine mission. But all that Moses really says, is that the Egyptians did (by which he could not possibly mean more than that they *seemed* or *pretended to do*) by their arts and tricks, what he performed by the finger and power of God. The word which we render *so*, only means a *general similitude*, and by no means, necessarily, a *perfect sameness*, respecting both the effect and the cause. Nay, this very word is applied when the magicians failed of success. Exod. vii. 20. *They did so, to bring forth*

forth lice, but they could not, that is, they practised the same arts, but in vain. Also the words which we render *enchantments*, &c. only signify *covered arts*, and *secret sleights*, in which the Egyptians are known to have excelled.

If the Egyptian magicians were really possessed of supernatural power, why did they not employ it to defeat the purposes of Moses's miracles, and relieve their country? More especially, why did they not guard themselves from the boils which are expressly said to have been upon the magicians, as well as upon Pharaoh, and the rest of the Egyptians; and why did they fail in the case of the lice? The reason of this failure plainly appears, from the history, to have been, that, with respect to this miracle, they had no notice beforehand what they were to do, and therefore could not prepare themselves as before.

Pharaoh himself would naturally imagine that the miracles of Moses were only such tricks as his own magicians excelled in, and therefore very properly called them in, to see whether they could do the same, and detect the imposition; and so long as they could contrive to seem to do any thing like what Moses performed, it is no won-

der that, circumstanced and prejudiced as he was, he shut his eyes to the evidence of the divine power which accompanied Moses.

In fact, the Egyptian magicians themselves seem to have confessed that there was nothing above the art and power of man in what they did, when, upon their failing to produce lice, they acknowledged that the *finger of God*, or, as it might be rendered, the *finger of a God*, or something supernatural, was in it.

It has been said that, in several respects, the present state of the world, and of mankind, does not correspond to what is said of the history of them in the books of Moses. But the more we understand of natural and civil history, the less weight there appears to be in all objections of this kind.

It has been said that the peopling of America is inconsistent with the supposition of the derivation of the whole race of mankind from one pair. But it is now almost certain, that America was, in fact, peopled from the continent of Europe and Asia, and especially the North Eastern parts of the latter, which is found to be very near, and may perhaps have been joined to it. This is argued from a similarity in features, customs,

customs, vegetable, and animal productions, &c.

Objections have been made to the Mosaic account of the *creation*, and the general *deluge*. But even in these cases the history of Moses is found to supply a more probable hypothesis, to account for the present state of things, than any other that has yet been proposed; and improvements in philosophy do, upon the whole, rather strengthen than weaken this conclusion.

It is alledged that the origin of the *Blacks* cannot be accounted for on the principles of the Mosaic history. But there are several ways by which this fact may be reconciled with what Moses has advanced concerning Adam and Noah. If natural means be not thought sufficient to produce this effect, on a few individuals, in some early age, that change may have been produced supernaturally, though not mentioned by Moses, and the propagation of Blacks from Blacks, whenever that variety in the species took place, is allowed to be according to the common course of nature. The copper colour of the Americans, and the low stature of the Laplanders and Esquimaux, have also been alledged by unbelievers, but to as little purpose.

The objection to the Mosaic history of the *long lives of the Antediluvians*, and the gigantick stature of some of the inhabitants of Palestine, may be easily passed without any answer; because there is no contradiction to suppose it to be true, nor is it so very improbable that the state of mankind may have been very different in former times from what it is at present.

The history of the *fall of man* is said to have much the appearance of a fable. But it is sufficient for the purpose of revelation, if it be true in general, that the evils of the present state were not introduced till the sins of mankind made this state of labour and death appear to be the fittest for them. The fabulous circumstances may possibly have been introduced by the hieroglyphical manner in which that early history might be first written. But even the literal account may, in most particulars, have been true.

As to the history of transactions so much older than Moses, so general an account as he has given of them might very well have been transmitted through the few generations which preceded him, or it might have been communicated to him by revelation. This however is not very probable, since

since Moses no where asserts it; and he seems to be exceedingly exact in distinguishing all that he received from God, from what he relates of his own knowledge, or the information of others.

## SECTION II.

*Of the Objection to revelation from the supposed Inspiration of the scriptures, and others of a similar nature.*

SOME objections to the Jewish and christian revelations are founded on small inconsistencies, and mistakes in the canonical books of scripture. But such objections as these do not by any means affect the divinity of the system of religion which they contain; because the contents of those books may be true *in the main*, notwithstanding such inconsistencies and mistakes. All historians, even those of the most approved credit, have been sub-

ject to small inadvertencies and errors. No history of Rome or England was ever written without them; but do we therefore say, that there is *no* truth in them. Nay the discovery of such small mistakes is never imagined to affect the credit of the important facts.

Allowing, therefore, that, in the books of Kings, a prince is said to have reigned one number of years, and in the books of Chronicles another; that one of the Evangelists speaks of *both the thieves*, reviling Christ, whereas another says that only *one* of them did it; that in one of the gospels Christ is represented as purging the temple on the day that he arrived at Jerusalem, and that in another he is not said to have done it till the day following (and unbelievers do not pretend to have found any mistakes of more consequence than these) how do they invalidate the truth of the general history? In reality, all such inconsistencies as these are so far from making it probable that the whole story is a fiction, that, according to the most established methods of estimating the value of testimony, they give the greater air of truth to every particular of importance, in which they all agree. We see, in fact, that true history

history has always been written in the same manner; and without particular contrivance and combination, and consequently without a very strong suspicion of falsehood, histories of the same period, and the same transactions, could not be written otherwise.

Admitting, therefore, that the Evangelists were misinformed with respect to a variety of incidental circumstances, or even that they overlooked, or did not sufficiently attend to, some of such particulars above-mentioned as might have fallen under their own observation, are these things of such a nature, as to dispose any person to call in question the reality of the principal miracles, or their history of the death and resurrection of Christ? And without this the *proper evidence of christianity* is not in the least affected; because if these important facts be true, we have still abundant reason to believe that Christ will come again to raise the dead, and judge the world, which is the great object and end of our christian faith.

The evidence for the truth of all the facts which are related by the same historian is by no means equal; because it will necessarily happen that he will have a better opportunity of procuring authentic informa-

tion concerning some of them than others. For this reason, the history of the infancy and childhood of Christ cannot be said to be as unexceptionable as the history of his most important miracles ; and unless these leading facts be disproved, the religion of Jesus Christ stands unshaken.

As I think this consideration of some consequence to the evidence of christianity, I shall exemplify my meaning by referring my reader to the history of the *wise men*, who are said to have come from the East, in order to pay their respects to the new born Jesus, directed by a miraculous light, in the form of a star, and also to the history of the death and resurrection of Christ. Both these histories are related by the same Evangelist, Matthew ; but the evidence of their truth is certainly very different, though both of them may be strictly true. The former of them is related by Matthew only, who does not say that he could attest it from his own knowledge, or so much as intimate that he was an eye witness to any part of the transaction ; so that it is probable that he had it from the report of others, and of how many others, perhaps in succession, we cannot tell.

On the other hand, the history of the death and resurrection of Christ is related by three other Evangelists as well as by Matthew himself; and from the circumstances of the facts, it appears that they must have been known to all the disciples of Christ, and to almost the whole body of the Jewish nation; and moreover a great number of incontestable miracles were wrought by all the apostles, and other primitive Christians, expressly in confirmation of the power and authority which was conferred upon Christ, and evidenced by his resurrection. When, therefore, the evidence for the history of the wise men is so very small in comparison of the evidence for the history of the death and resurrection of Christ, the former may be given up (though it is by no means necessary to do it) without in the least invalidating the evidence of the other.

When this manifest difference in point of evidence, with respect to facts related by the same Evangelists, shall be sufficiently attended to, our faith in the great and leading facts in the history of Christ, from whence we are led to believe him to be a teacher sent from God, and to expect his coming to judge the world, and to give to

every man according to his works, will stand much firmer, and will not be liable to be shaken by the exceptions which unbelievers are apt to make to some inconsiderable circumstances in the history of the Old or New Testament, the credibility of which is, in reality, of no moment whatever to the proper evidence of the Jewish and christian revelations.

Christian divines having maintained the absolute inspiration of every word of the canonical books of scripture has been attended with very bad consequences, by laying the system of revelation open to so many insignificant, but plausible objections ; and this kind of inspiration is as needless, as it is impossible to be maintained. Besides, the inspiration of the original writers would have answered no end, unless every transcriber, and every translator of the books of scripture had been inspired also ; because a failure of inspiration in either of these cases, would still have been a source of error and mistake. Small errors, and mistakes of various kinds, are unavoidable in all writings ; but since they are of no material consequence, there was no reason for guarding against them, even in the first instance.

Let

Let us, therefore, read the canonical books of scripture without expecting to find them perfectly unexceptionable in all the minutiae of things. Let us consider them as the productions of honest and faithful men, well informed concerning all the great things of which they write, but not equally informed with respect to every punctilio they mention. Let us consider the great truths they deliver, as from God, to be divine, and worthy of our highest regard; but when they *argue* and *reason*, either from the facts, or revealed doctrines, advancing opinions which are plainly their own, and for which they do not pretend to have the authority of revelation, let us consider them as the reasonings and opinions of men in their situation, and with their means of information, which were in general very ample and sufficient, but still left them fallible, and treat them accordingly. St. Paul says expressly, that some of the things which he advanced were not from the Lord, but from himself only; and in other cases the nature of the things will help us to distinguish between them.

Many of the objections which have been made to revelation have arisen from the ignorance of the manners and customs of the Jews,

Jews, and other Asiatic nations ; and others from an ignorance of the climate and geography of the country ; but as the antient manners and customs of the East have continued, with little or no change, to the present times, the travels which have of late been made into Judea, and the neighbouring countries, have been the means of bringing us better acquainted with them, and of removing the objections. Many happy illustrations of passages of scripture from travels into the East may be found in an excellent work intitled *Observations on divers passages of scripture from voyages and travels into the East.*

Some objections to revelation are founded upon an ignorance of the *language* of the scriptures, and of the phraseology which is almost peculiar to the oriental nations ; and some unbelievers have been so exceedingly rash and precipitate in their censures, as not to have looked beyond the very words or verfes to which they have objected, when otherwife a child would have seen no difficulty.

M. Voltaire, in more than one of his pieces, represents the Jews as canibals, and pretends to prove from Ez. xxxix. 17—20. that God encourages them with the promise

mise of feeding on the flesh of their enemies.\* But if he had read so much as the verse preceding, he must have seen that the whole passage was a fine apostrophe, addressed to the birds and beasts of prey, and was intended to express, in a very emphatical manner, a very great overthrow of the enemies of the Jews. *And thou son of man, Thus saith the Lord God, Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come, gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice, that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh and drink blood. Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan. And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. Thus ye shall be filled at my table with horses, and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord God.*

When, afterwards, this author acknowledges his mistake, as he does in a postscript to the abovementioned treatise, he says, by

\* *Traité sur la Tolerance*, p. 118.

way of apology for it, but contrary to all common sense, that two of the verses which I have recited might have been addressed to the Jews, as well as to the birds and beasts. What can we think of the fairness and competency of judgment in this most distinguished of modern unbelievers, when he is capable of writing in this very absurd and unguarded manner.

### SECTION III:

*Some objections which more nearly affect the proper evidence of revelation, especially respecting the antient and present state of the belief of it.*

**I**T has been said by some modern unbelievers, that the books which were written by the early adversaries of christianity have been suppressed by the friends of it, so that we cannot at this day tell what was written against, or objected to christianity, at

at the first promulgation of it. But this is an assertion destitute of all proof, or probability; for then all christian writers must have carefully avoided the mention of such books, in their own writings which are come down to us, whereas they have been so far from doing any thing like this, that it is the opinion of criticks, that almost the whole of Celsus's treatise against christianity is transcribed into Origen's answer to it, and a great part of Julian's into that of Cyril. Eusebius has also preserved large extracts from the writings of Porphyry; and the same has been the conduct of other christian apologists, with respect to other opponents of christianity.

No persons more sincerely regret the loss of these writings than learned christians of the present age; but in the same undistinguishing ravages of time, have perished what we regret more, namely the writings of many early christians, and antient historians. Besides, how could it, in reason, be expected that christians should take any peculiar care of the writings of their adversaries. If those supposed writings had contained any thing *decisive* against christianity, they would certainly (considering the very great advantages under which they were

were written, for the space of three hundred years) have effectually prevented the spread of christianity, and would have preserved themselves; whereas the universal neglect into which they fell is, if any thing, an argument of their futility, and furnishes a reason why we should comfort ourselves for the loss of them.

It has been said that if Christ worked so many miracles as the evangelical history represents, healing all the diseased that applied to him, and in three instances raising the dead, he must necessarily have converted the whole Jewish nation, and all the strangers in the country; as it could not but be concluded, that a man who controlled the course of nature must have the concurrence and assistance of the God of nature, and consequently a sufficient testimony of a divine mission.

To this it is replied, that the preaching of Christ seems to have had all the effect that it could be supposed to have had, admitting his divine mission. Great numbers of those who were of an ingenuous disposition, on whom evidence could produce its proper effect, did become the disciples of Christ, notwithstanding he persisted in disclaiming all worldly honours, and that character

character which they imagined to be inseparable from the promised Messiah ; an effect which nothing but the fullest and best grounded conviction can be supposed to have produced.

With respect to the rest of the Jews, and especially the chief priests and rulers, it should be considered how incredulous strong prejudices, and especially those which arise from vicious habits usually make men. It was with the bulk of the Jews a fixed, though an erroneous persuasion, that the Messiah would assume temporal power, and deliver his country from the yoke of the Romans. This they imagined to be the specific character of the Messiah, as deduced from prophecies which they were convinced came from God. To the evidence of miracles, therefore, they would oppose that of the scriptures, and consequently the miracles of Moses and the prophets, with which they seemed to be irreconcilable ; and this, joined to their vicious habits, which rendered them extremely averse to the pure doctrines of the gospel (having no idea that repentance was at all necessary to their being intitled to the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, which they thought belonged to all the children of

of Abraham) must have rendered them extremely obdurate with respect to the evidence of the divine mission of Christ; so that it is not to be wondered that so many of them persisted in their hatred and opposition to him, notwithstanding all his miracles.

Unhappily, also, the Jews were at that time infected with the notion of the power of demons, and evil spirits, and thought it possible that by a confederacy with them Christ might heal those diseases which were usually ascribed to their power over mankind; and they had probably some similar method of accounting for the rest of his miracles.

After the Pharisees and rulers of the Jews had observed how thoroughly exasperated Jesus was against them, how he exposed all their pride and hypocrisy, and how little disposed he was to shew them any favour, it is no wonder that they were determined to reject him *in any character*, thinking the Romans better masters than such a Messiah as he would be with respect to them. Thus their fears and their interest together would lead them to oppose Jesus at all events, whether he was the Messiah or not. The more reasonable and considerate among them might, however, be satisfied that God could

could not contradict himself, and that it was more probable that they had misinterpreted the scriptures, than that the undeniable miracles of Jesus were not proofs of an authority to which they ought to submit.

With the modern Jews it should be a sufficient answer to this objection, that their ancestors frequently opposed Moses and the prophets, even persecuting and killing some of them, notwithstanding their allowed character of messengers from God.

To assist us to form a right judgement in this case, let us consider what would be the probable effect of preaching against popery, even with the power of working miracles, in Spain or Portugal, for the space of a year and a few months, which appears to me to have been the period of Christ's public ministry. In these circumstances, I should think that to expect the immediate reformation of the whole country, strongly prejudiced as the people are known to be, would be to expect more than a just knowledge of human nature, and of the history of mankind, would warrant. How many would these be who, not being in the way of the preacher, and not seeing the miracles themselves, would give no attention whatever to any *reports* concerning

concerning them ; and who, being satisfied with themselves that the reports could not possibly be true, would obstinately persist in rejecting all evidence in their favour ; and if these persons, as would probably be the case, were men of rank, and distinguished for their knowledge, it could not but have great influence upon the common people. . Upon the whole, it will hardly be thought improbable, that after such a person had opposed the superstition of an ignorant and vicious people, and had laboured to throw down the false foundation of their hopes of future happiness, they would endeavour to do by him as the Jews did by Christ. At most, his success could not be supposed to be much greater in proportion.

As to the miracles of the apostles, the same motives, whatever they were, that led the Jews to oppose those of Christ, would lead them to oppose theirs also ; and the more as they were now irritated by *opposition*, though the power of truth would make its way by degrees.

It is evident that many of the most intelligent of the *Heathens*, especially Marcus Antoninus, would not give any proper attention to any accounts of miracles, so many things of this kind having been reported, which,

which, upon examination, appeared to be tricks or illusions ; though had these men been satisfied that the course of nature had realy been controlled, it cannot be supposed but that they must have been convinced of the interposition of the divine power and providence. Many of the Greeks and Romans, however, had a great opinion of the power of Magic, and, without considering the nature and circumstances of the christian miracles, supposed them to have been performed by some such means.

If we consider the state of the Gentile world and of christianity in early times, we may very well account for the general rejection of it, without any impeachment of its truth.

The Gentiles in general could not reconcile the idea of the ignominious death of Christ with the great power which his disciples ascribed to him. The more opulent and politer part of them were also disgusted because the first proselytes to christianity were generally of the lower sort, and many of them slaves, whom they held in extreme contempt, and with whom they could not bear the thought of associating. The Greek philosophers were exceedingly fond of their knowledge and eloquence, and disdained

disdained to receive instruction from such illiterate persons as the apostles and the primitive christians in general were. They were also exceedingly offended at the spirit of christianity, as being at enmity with all other religions ; they being of opinion that different modes of worship, and different religions, were even pleasing to the Gods.

The leading men in all the heathen states had a very high idea of the authority of the civil magistrate, and had always considered the business of religion as intirely subject to his controul ; and therefore thought that the mere *obstinacy* of the christians, in refusing to submit to the laws, was of itself deserving of capital punishment. In this manner Trajan reasons in his answer to Pliny. Many of the Gentiles confounded the christians with the *sects* among the Jews, whom they held in contempt ; and therefore they would not so much as give any attention to their preaching or miracles. The common people considered all those who were enemies to their superstitions as *atheists*, and to this term the greatest odium ever annexed ; and there are several proofs of their regarding the Epicureans, and the christians in the same light. Besides Paganism had the advantage, which

which is common to every thing that has been long established ; the sanction of *antiquity*, whereas christianity was despised as a novel, and upstart thing.

We are not, however, to suppose that all the impression which the evidences of christianity made on the minds of men is to be estimated by the number of the declared converts to it, since many both of Jews and Gentiles entertained a favourable opinion of the gospel, but were unwilling to own it for fear of censure, ridicule, and persecution, and hoped that God would overlook it, provided they did nothing in direct opposition to christianity, and did not themselves join in the persecution of christians.

It staggers some persons that there should be so many unbelievers in the *present* age ; but those who know the world, and the circumstances in which infidelity gains ground, will see nothing in it that is, in fact, unfavourable to the evidences of christianity. It would be unjust to unbelievers to rank them all in the same class. I shall, therefore, endeavour to point out the different sources of infidelity in the present age.

A great number of those who profess to reject christianity are not only such persons as have never considered the subject, or indeed have a sufficient stock of knowledge to examine it with proper attention, but they are also known to be, in general, men of profligate lives and characters ; and surely it cannot weigh much, with reasonable and thinking men, that a thing is not believed by those who are so circumstanced that they must necessarily be exceedingly prepossessed against the belief of it, and who are known, for that very reason, to have taken no pains to inform themselves concerning it. I do not think that I shall be deemed uncharitable in concluding, that a very great majority of modern unbelievers are of this class. Many, however, I readily acknowledge, are of a different character ; but these, I dare say, will agree with me in my censure of the rest.

Others are men of fair and reputable characters, many of them men of taste and science, especially in Popish countries, who taking it for granted that what passes for christianity is really so, or who, from a cursory inspection of the books of scripture, conceive that some of the things related of God are unworthy of him, think it

it superfluous to attend to any discussion of its historical evidence. They also see that the writers of the books of scripture have fallen into some inaccuracies, that their narration is not, in all respects, perfectly coherent with itself, or that the different accounts of the same transaction are not altogether consistent with each other.

These men of genius may discover some things that are frivolous or weak in the discourses of the sacred writers, and some things inconclusive in their reasoning, especially in their quotations from, and their application of the Old Testament ; and taking it for granted that (as indeed the professors of christianity have too generally and incautiously boasted) the books which contain the history of our religion are as perfect as the religion itself, hastily conclude, that because the books of scripture were written by men, and bear the marks of human imperfection, therefore the scheme in which they were engaged was wholly of men, and had nothing supernatural in it ; without reflecting that those very imperfections in the books of scripture, at which they are so much offended, demonstrate that the writers of them were incapable of contriving such a scheme, or of procuring

credit to it ; and also without reflecting that, on the very same grounds, they might reject the whole current of antient history, no part of which has been written with perfect accuracy, uniformity, or even consistency. For here, as in the scripture history, different historians agree in their accounts of the principal things only ; but as certainly differ in their accounts of lesser circumstances.

Men of taste and science are also exceedingly apt to be struck with the idea of what appears, on the first view, to be *rational* and *liberal* in their sentiments, and remote from *vulgar prejudices* ; and because the bulk of mankind are, in many respects, credulous, and often think very absurdly, these gentlemen, though they will not avow it, and indeed may not be sensible of it, are secretly disposed to reject what others admit, and to pride themselves in their singularity in this respect ; thinking it more great, noble, and philosophical, to err on the side of incredulity ; whereas they ought to consider that the understandings of all mankind being naturally similar, even the lowest of the vulgar, when lying under no prejudice (and men of letters are subject to their peculiar prejudices as well as the illiterate)

illiterate) must be as capable of judging concerning *truth*, and especially concerning *facts* as themselves ; that their opinions, if they are not true, are founded upon something analogous to truth, though the analogy may be faulty ; and therefore are not to be rejected at random, but are themselves an object worthy of philosophical investigation. A true philosopher will no more satisfy himself without endeavouring to have the rise and progress of prevailing opinions, than without understanding the cause of any other *general appearance* in nature.

The opinion of men of letters, however, and of speculative persons of all kinds, will always have great weight with many who do not pretend to speculation. As they will not take the pains to think for themselves, they chuse to think with *philosophers* rather than with the *vulgar* ; not considering that men of learning and genius, who are ever so capable of determining justly, have no advantage over the rest of mankind, unless they will carefully *attend* to a subject, and make themselves masters of it ; and that a politician might as well be expected to be an astronomer, or an astronomer a politician, as that a mere

philosopher should be a competent judge of the evidences of christianity, when his attention to them has been very superficial, if he have attended to them at all.

I will not deny that some unbelievers are *serious* and *inquisitive* men ; they even wish to find christianity to be true, and have some secret hope that it may be so ; but they cannot fully satisfy themselves with respect to many objections which they have heard made to it ; so that the arguments in favour of it do not, at least they do not always preponderate with them. Were a very great number of persons in this situation, it would be a circumstance, I readily own, that might afford a reasonable foundation for doubt, or at least for suspence ; but considering how very few these serious and inquisitive unbelievers are, in comparison with the numbers who are profligate and thoughtless among them, I think that no conclusion can be drawn from the consideration of it, unfavourable to the evidences of christianity. For what cause is there so good and so clear, as that *every person* can be brought to join in it ?

Some of the persons above-mentioned may have been much in the way of sensible and subtle unbelievers, to whose objections,

ons, through want of presence of mind, or of a sufficiently comprehensive acquaintance with the subject, they have not been able readily to reply ; or, being persons of weak and timid dispositions, they may have been led by their extreme anxiety to give more attention to the objections which have been thrown in their way than to the plain and solid arguments in favour of christianity ; on which account only the former may have made more impression upon their minds than the latter ; whereas if they had been more conversant with christians and christian writers, and less with unbelievers and their writings, they would have thought as well of the evidences of christianity as of christianity itself ; objections which have been swelled into mountains in their imaginations, would have appeared no greater than mole hills ; and doubt and anxiety would never have invaded them. Besides, it is true, I believe, in general, that the things at which well disposed minds stumble the most, are such as ought to give them no offence, being quite foreign to christianity, though unhappily they have been generally deemed to belong to it.

Having considered *who*, and *how many* of the present age are unbelievers, let it like-

wife be considered if not how many, at least *who*, are the believers.

With respect to the *ministers*, or professed teachers of christianity, I am well aware, it will be said, that, besides the prejudices of education in favour of their religion, in common with the bulk of the people, they are *gainers* by the system, and therefore that they must be set aside as of no weight in the case. I am very ready to own that, in these circumstances, their mere *profession* of christianity has no weight, because it is consistent with real infidelity; but allowing them to be men of sense, study, and inquiry, and withal men of fair moral characters, their *sincere belief* of christianity certainly has *some* weight, especially in cases in which the gains of the profession do not place them much above the common level of their fellow citizens.

Study and inquiry cannot but be allowed to be, in some measure, a balance to the prejudices of education; besides that, in numberless cases, this prejudice is much more than balanced by an opposite one, which is peculiarly incident to studious and learned men, viz. the affectation of being thought wiser than our ancestors, and free from vulgar prejudices. As to the emoluments

luments of the christian ministry, they are not so great as to be sufficient, in other cases, to induce an equal number of men, in similiar circumstances, to wish to acquire them by the habitual and constant profession of a falsehood.

Setting aside the great dignitaries in the church of Rome or of England, many clergymen, in the latter of these establishments especially, who have had no great preferment in the church, men of reading and understanding, have written very able defences of christianity.

If it be said that these men, though but poorly provided for at the time in which they wrote, might have considerable *expectations*, and that several of them did in fact attain to great preferment in the church, in consequence of their defences of christianity, this cannot be said of those *dissenting ministers* who have defended the same cause with equal zeal, and not less ability. What advantage did Foster, Leland, or Lardner gain by the important services which they rendered the christian cause? The two former, if I have been rightly informed, died poor, and the last, besides almost the whole of a very long life, spent

a considerable part of his own independent fortune in the publication of his works.

If the evidence of such men as these must be set aside, nothing surely, worth replying to, can be objected to the belief and defence of christianity by such men as Locke, Newton, or Hartley ; all men of sober minds, in no other respect the dupes of vulgar prejudice, least of all those of education, all of them men of strict virtue and integrity, all of them men of the first rate abilities, the two latter of them especially infinitely superior to any of the advocates for infidelity. These men gave the closest attention to the subject, and they were masters of all the previous knowledge that is requisite to form a competent judgement in the case. They certainly could have no views of interest in their profession or defences of christianity ; and, as men of letters, would probably have gained rather than have lost any thing in point of general estimation, by espousing the cause of infidelity. For it can hardly be denied that the works of such men as Mr. Hume and Voltaire have been much more read and admired in consequence of their being unbelievers, than they would otherwise have been.

It

It is not easy, for want of a sufficient knowledge of antient and distant countries, to compare the state of the belief of Judaism and christianity with that of any system of heathenism or Mohammedanism, which are deemed to be false both by believers and unbelievers of christianity ; but as far as we are able to make this comparison, all the conclusion that can be drawn from it is certainly in favour of the Jewish and christian religions. It will not be pretended that so much as one philosopher, or man of letters, was a serious believer of any *pagan system*, notwithstanding their opposition to christianity at its first promulgation. In Mohammedan countries there is at present very little reading or study, and if we be not misinformed by some late travellers, those who are addicted to study, or who have any thing of a speculative turn, are generally supposed to be unbelievers. However, nothing written against their religion was ever read or heard of in any Mohammedan country. -

Upon the whole, I think we may conclude, at least fairly presume, that no imposture has even stood such a test as christianity has already stood, without being exploded; and notwithstanding the

spread of infidelity at present, yet, considering among whom it spreads, and who they are that oppose the spread of it, it can hardly be doubted, by an indifferent spectator, but that the belief of christianity, so far from being in any danger of becoming extinct, will maintain its ground, and continue to be the serious belief of the virtuous, the sober minded, and the learned of the present and future ages; and this will be an omen of its finally triumphing over all opposition, and of the belief of it coming at length to be universal, and undisputed.

Sincere christians have no more reason to be shocked at the prevalence of infidelity in the present age, than at the prevalence of *evils* in general, or of *vice* in particular. There can be no doubt but that evils of every kind answer the best of purposes in the system of God's moral government, and that they are a very important part of that most admirable *discipline*, by which mankind are training up to the knowledge of truth and the practice of virtue. Nor do I think that it requires any great depth of judgment, or knowledge of human nature, to perceive this.

Supposing

Supposing it to be the intention of any person to form a proper number of truly great, excellent, and generous minds, he must place them in a world not less abounding with calamity, and even with vice, than this. There could be no dependence either upon the *genuinness*, or the *stability* of that virtue which had not been formed, and exercised, in such circumstances.

In like manner, the most rational and the most steady believer in christianity, is the man who has heard and considered all the serious objections that unbelievers can make to it, and who has also been exposed to the ridicule with which it is treated by those who have the reputation of men of sense and of being free from vulgar prejudices. The man who has passed through this trial, whose faith has not been shaken, but has been more firmly established by the reasonings of unbelievers ; who has not been made ashamed of his profession by the ridicule and contempt to which it has exposed him, but who can be content to be ranked among the *fools* and *narrow minded* by the celebrated free thinkers of the age, in a firm belief of, and patient waiting for that day, which shall *confound the wisdom of the now reputed wise*, is a christian of a higher

higher rank, and greater value, and is more to be depended upon for acting a truly christian part, which requires superiority of mind to this world, and to the vain pursuits and transitory emoluments of it, than the man who has only been taught to take the system for granted, and who is unacquainted with the proper evidence on which his faith rests.

Moreover, as those who believe in the perfect moral government of God entertain no doubt, but that all calamity and vice will be made to cease, when they have answered the purposes for which they were permitted to exist; so the christian looks forward with joy to that time, when the religion of Christ shall triumph over all opposition, when the firm belief of it will be universal, and when, in consequence of this, being more deeply rooted in men's hearts, it will bring forth the proper fruits of it in their lives and conversations.

When these things are duly considered, I hope that the present state of the belief of christianity will afford no just foundation for any objection to it, but that it will rather supply an argument in favour of it.

## SECTION IV.

*Miscellaneous objections to the system of revelation.*

THE want of universality can be no objection to the truth of christianity ; but upon the supposition of the knowledge of it being absolutely necessary to the final happiness of men, which is denied by all rational christians, who believe that all men will be judged according to the advantages which they have severally enjoyed, for attaining to the knowledge of truth and the practice of virtue ; and consequently that the most ignorant and idolatrous heathen may meet with more favour from his judge than many professing christians, whose conduct, though, to outward appearance, it has been much better, yet not in proportion to their greater advantages.

It

It is greatly favourable to christianity, and indeed almost peculiar to it, that it shews no favour to christians as such. The bigotted Jews and the Mohammedans denounce anathemas against unbelievers as such, and suppose that the wicked among them will be more respected by God hereafter than the rest of mankind, whereas the gospel speaks quite another language. To those who say *Lord, Lord*, without submitting to the laws of Christ, he will reply at the last, *Verily, verily, I know you not, depart from me ye workers of iniquity.* It is also one of his maxims, that *he who knows his Lord's will and does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.* To the same purpose, likewise, do the apostles write.

Some persons have objected to the evidences of christianity, but certainly without sufficient reason, the *differences of opinion* among christians, since the very same objection may be made to natural religion, and indeed to every thing that has ever been imagined of so much *importance*, as to engage much of the *attention* of mankind, the consequence of which has always been different conceptions concerning it. Were not the disciples of Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato divided among themselves? Are there not

not as many sects among the Mohammedans, as among the christians ? And are there not almost as many different opinions among the Papists, as among the Protestants, notwithstanding they profess to be possessed of an infallible judge in all controversies of faith ? Do not even our ablest lawyers give different opinions concerning the sense of acts of parliament, which were intended to convey the most determinate meaning, so as to obviate all cavils ? Nay have we not equal reason to expect that unbelievers should agree in the same system of unbelief ? If they say to us, Agree first among yourselves, and tell us what christianity is, and we will tell you what we have to object to it ; we have a right to reply, Do you agree first with respect to what you suppose to be wrong in it, tell us what you object to, and we will then consider of the proper answer.

In fact, every unbeliever must read the New Testament for himself. If, when he is uninfluenced by any criminal prejudice, he really cannot give his assent to what he believes to be the religion of those books, he will be justified in his unbelief ; but if he have taken up his notions of christianity from others, or from an examination of his own

own inadequate to the importance of the subject, he certainly cannot be justified. I, for my own part, can only exhibit what appears to me the true idea of christianity, and the most rational defence of it. If any other person, believer or unbeliever, think it to be exceptionable, he must look out for another, that to himself shall appear less so, and I also shall think myself at liberty to relinquish my notions, and adopt his.

It is highly unreasonable to object to christianity the various *mischiefs* which it has indirectly occasioned in the world, since there is nothing useful or excellent that has not had similar consequences. By this method of reasoning, it might be concluded with certainty, that our *passions* and affections were not the gift of God, for they are daily the cause of great and serious evils. In fact, the more important any thing is, and the more extensive and happy are its consequences, in some proportion, generally, are the evils which it occasionally produces.

This is remarkably the case with *civil government*. It is certainly far preferable to a state of nature, and yet it gives occasion to a multitude of crimes, and such

horrid excesses of all the passions as cannot be known in uncivilized countries.

The persecutions of christians by christians, has not been worse than the persecution of christians by such heathen emperors as Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius, not to mention Nero or Diocletian; and has, besides, most evidently arisen from a gross perversion of the genuine spirit of christianity, which breathes nothing but forbearance and love. There is also a view in which all these evils may be considered as highly favourable to the evidences of christianity, since they were distinctly foreseen and foretold by Christ and the apostles. Besides, when we consider the havock that has been made by christian persecutors, we should also consider the laudable zeal of the many who favoured and sheltered those who were persecuted.

To make a juster estimate of the moral influence of christianity, let us consider with impartiality the character of the present times. Was Europe less corrupt a century ago, when there were fewer unbelievers than it is now, that they are more numerous? It is plain from experience and observation, that the most vicious and abandoned of the present age are professed unbelievers

believers, and that the most strictly virtuous, those who are the most strenuous in their opposition to the progress of vice, are professing and zealous christians. Let it also be considered whether any more humane and enlarged sentiments were entertained before the promulgation of christianity in heathen countries. Now whatever may be said in favour of the virtuous and humane sentiments of the heathen philosophers, it cannot be pretended that they exerted their eloquence in favour of toleration for the poor persecuted christians. On the contrary, they generally exerted their influence to make them ridiculous and odious. The moderation of the present times is certainly owing both to the unbelievers and the protestants, and both were perhaps led into it by the consideration of their own circumstances, as the weaker party.

It is plain from fact, that it was not the intention of the divine being, by means of natural or revealed religion, of any kind of knowledge, or any other advantage of which we are possessed, to establish a state of universal virtue and happiness in the present world. In all the divine dispensations we are treated as accountable or improveable creatures ; but it is evidently necessary

cessary to such a state, that we be capable of growing worse as well as better, by every species of discipline ; and the very same circumstances may produce both these different effects on the minds of different persons. The same prosperity that excites sentiments of gratitude, and a liberal benevolent disposition in some, inspires others with insolence, rapaciousness, and cruelty ; adversity also may be the parent either of industry, or fraud ; so that neither of them has necessarily and invariably a good effect upon the mind. The dispensation of the gospel, therefore, may be similar to this, without any impeachment of its divine original.

The evidence of truth may also come under the same rules with the means of virtue, and thus the arguments in favour of divine revelation may be sufficient to convince the candid, impartial, and well disposed, at the same time that they may afford those who are of a different disposition handles enow for cavilling, such as, in their state of mind, will justify their rejection of it to themselves. To this our Lord might possibly allude when he said, John ix. 39. *For judgement I am come into this world, that they who see not might see, and*

*and that they who see might be made blind; and, John vii. 17. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.* To the same purpose is the prophecy of Simeon, Luke ii. 34. *Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against.*

It is often taken for granted that the design of revelation in general, and of christianity in particular, was simply *to reform the world*, and that end not having been completely answered by it, it has been objected by unbelievers, that it could not have been from God, who would certainly have chosen sufficient means to gain all his ends. But considering that men are accountable creatures, and capable of abusing every advantage of which they are possessed, both reason and revelation do, in fact, in all cases, answer the end for which they were given, whether they be abused or improved, whether, as the apostle Paul says, they be *a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.*

I shall conclude these observations on the difficulties which attend the Jewish and christian revelations, with remarking that the question

question is not whether any of the particulars I have mentioned, separately taken, be likely or unlikely to come from God, but whether *the whole system*, attended with such difficulties, may be divine. If it were possible that any person should be asked, *a priori*, whether it was probable that, under the government of a wise and good being, an innocent child should inherit the diseases, poverty, and vices of its parent; or whether no distinction would be made between the righteous and the wicked in war, pestilence, famine, or earthquakes, he would certainly answer it was not probable; though when he should come to know, and attentively to consider the whole system, of which such events make a part, he might be satisfied that it was the result of perfect wisdom, directed by infinite goodness; and even that a scheme more favourable to happiness or virtue could not have been formed; and the time may come, when we shall know and acknowledge the same with respect to the *extraordinary*, that we do with respect to the *ordinary* dispensations of the divine being.

The advantage which christianity derives from the objections of unbelievers is various and considerable. This circumstance has

has been the means of purging it from what was foreign and indefensible, and also of setting its evidences in a clearer and stronger light; so that many persons who before took their religion upon trust, do now adhere to it upon a rational conviction of its truth and excellence, and hold it in greater purity than they would otherwise have done. And as the heathen philosophy contributed to discredit the popular religions of the Gentile world, which served as a preparation for the promulgation of the gospel, so the writings and discourses of unbelievers in the present age seem to be sapping the foundations of the Popish corruptions of Christianity, and preparing the way for the establishment of the pure religion of Christ in their place.

Christianity, after having stood such a trial as this, will no more be exposed to such virulent attacks as before, but will acquire such a *fixed character of truth*, as it could never have obtained without the opposition which it has met with. Such has been the fate of all the branches of true philosophy, of the Copernican system, the Newtonian theory of light and colours, and the Franklinian theory of electricity.

## THE CONCLUSION.

IT is in vain to say any thing by way of address to persons who will not read or think upon a subject. To the profligate and unthinking among the unbelievers I shall, therefore, say nothing, because they will not give themselves the trouble to read what I might be disposed to say to them; but to the more *moral*, *speculative*, and *thoughtful* unbelievers, into whose hands this treatise may possibly fall, I would observe, and they must agree with me in it, that, in justice to themselves and to the subject, they should give it the most serious and deliberate examination. To men of reason and reflection the evidences of christianity must appear the most interesting of all subjects of inquiry. For what can be more so than fully to ascertain, that the present state is not the whole of our existence, but that Jesus Christ, by the appointment of God his father, will come again to raise all the dead to a future endless life, and to give to every man according

to his works. This is the great object and end of christian faith ; and those who believe this important doctrine receive it on the authority of Jesus Christ, whose divine mission was attested, as they believe, by such miracles as no man could have performed, without the presence and concurrence of God.

Now before any person seriously rejects christianity, containing such important doctrines, he should certainly endeavour to satisfy himself, at least on what foundation it is that he finds his dissent ; and that such persons may more easily and effectually interrogate themselves upon the subject, I shall briefly propose a few leading questions, which may perhaps assist them to ascertain the state of their own minds, and lead them to such reflections, or disquisitions, as may be of most use to them with respect to it ; at the same time that they may serve as a kind of *recapitulation* of a few of the principal arguments in favour of christianity.

Is it not an indisputed fact, that there was such a person as Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate in Judea ?

Is it not also a well known fact, that he had some followers when living, but, notwithstanding

withstanding his ignominious sufferings, which disconcerted and dispersed all his adherents, many more after his death; and that he was even acknowledged by them to be the Messiah, foretold by their antient prophets, though he sustained a character the very reverse of what was expected by all the Jews, the good as well as the bad?

Are not the *gospels*, and the book of *A&ts*, which contain the history of the life of Christ, and of the propagation of his religion in the world, authentic writings? Were they not considered in all the early ages, both by the friends and enemies of christianity, as the genuine productions of the early disciples of Christ?

Can this be admitted without admitting also, that, what they relate concerning Christ and his apostles is, in the main, true, at least that they did something above the power of man, especially that Christ did actually rise from the dead, as he had foretold, and as a proof that what he taught he had by commission from God?

Is it probable that such men as the apostles were, should have been able to shake off the strongest Jewish prejudices, which no other Jews, whether, with respect to morality, they were good or bad men, were

ever able to do? Can they be supposed capable of inventing such a story, and especially of making it gain credit with the world, in such an age as that in which they lived, and circumstanced as they were for that purpose?

Admitting this to be possible, can any sufficient *motive* be assigned, to induce so many of them, not only to enter into a scheme of this nature, but, what is much more, to carry it on, with a perseverance unknown to the professors of any scheme of religion before them, in the face of all the difficulties that could be thrown in their way, and to die with all the marks of joy and confidence, without ever confessing the imposture.

If the leading facts above mentioned cannot be disputed, except upon such principles as must invalidate all antient history, and set aside all human testimony, every argument *a priori*, such as those which arise from the consideration of the sufficiency of the light of nature, the natural incredibility of miracles, &c. will certainly not deserve a hearing. How specious soever they may be represented, their influence will not be felt.

It will be clearly perceived that, whether it might have been reasonable to expect it, or not, God who made the world has *actually* interposed at various times in the government of it ; giving some of his creatures, at least, such information respecting their conduct here, and their expectations hereafter, as he judged to be useful and convenient for them ; and whatever difficulties may attend the speculative consideration of a future life, it will not be doubted but that we shall *in fact* live again, give an account of ourselves to God, and receive according to our works.

F I N I S.

*Published*

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL. D. F. R. S.

And Sold by

J. JOHNSON, Bookseller, at No. 72, in St. Paul's Church-Yard, London.

1. **T**HE History and Present State of Electricity, with original Experiments, illustrated with Copper-plates, the second Edition, corrected and enlarged, 4to. 1l. 1s.

2. The History and Present State of Discoveries relating to Vision, Light, and Colours, 2 vols. 4to. 1l. 1s. 6d.

3. A Familiar Introduction to the Study of Electricity, the Second Edit. 8vo. 3s.

4. A New Chart of History, containing a View of the principal Revolutions of Empire that have taken place in the World ; with a Book describing it, containing an Epitome of Universal History, Second Edition, 10s. 6d.

5. A Chart of Biography, with a Book, containing an Explanation of it, and a Catalogue of all the Names inserted in it, the Fourth Edition, very much improved, 10s. 6d.

6. A Familiar Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Perspective, with Copper-plates, Price 5s. in Boards.

7. The Rudiments of English Grammar, adapted to the Use of Schools, 1s. 6d.

8. The above Grammar, with Notes and Observations, for the Use of those who have made some Proficiency in the Language, the Third Edit. 3s.

BOOKS written by Dr. PRIESTLEY.

9. An Essay on the first Principles of Government, and on the Nature of Political, Civil, and Religious Liberty, the Second Edition, much enlarged, 5s.
10. Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion, Vol. I. containing the Elements of Natural Religion ; to which is prefixed, An Essay on the best Method of communicating religious Knowledge to the Members of Christian Societies, 2s. 6d.
11. A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters, on the Subject of the Lord's Supper, the Second Edit. 1s.
12. Considerations on Differences of Opinion among Christians ; with a Letter to the Rev. Mr. Venn, in Answer to his Examination of the Address to Protestant Dissenters, 1s. 6d.
13. A Catechism for Children and Young Persons, the Second Edition, 3d.
14. A Scripture Catechism, consisting of a Series of *Questions* only, with References to the Scriptures instead of *Answers*, 3d.
15. A Serious Address to Masters of Families, with Forms of Family Prayer, the Second Edition, 6d.
16. A View of the Principles and Conduct of the Protestant Dissenters, with Respect to the Civil and Ecclesiastical Constitution of England, the Second Edition, 1s. 6d.
17. A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters, on the Subject of Church-Discipline ; with a Preliminary Discourse concerning the Spirit of Christianity, and the Corruption of it by false Notions of Religion, 2s. 6d.

*Published under the direction of Dr. Priestley,*

The Theological Repository; consisting of Original Essays, Hints, Queries, &c. calculated to promote Religious Knowledge, 3 vols 8vo. 18s.

*Published by Mr. Johnson.*

1. A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters, as such. By a Dissenter. A new Edition, enlarged and corrected, Price 1s. 6d.—An Allowance is made to those who buy this Pamphlet to give away.

2. An Appeal to the serious and candid Professors of Christianity, on the following Subjects, viz. 1. The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion. 2. The Power of Man to do the Will of God. 3. Original Sin. 4. Election and Reprobation. 5. The Divinity of Christ, and, 6. Atonement for Sin by the Death of Christ, the Fourth Edition, 1d.

3. A Familiar Illustration of certain Passages of Scripture relating to the same Subjects, 4d. or 3s. 6d. per Dozen.

4. The Triumph of Truth; being an Account of the Trial of Mr. E. Elwall, for Heresy and Blasphemy, at Stafford Assizes, before Judge Denton, &c. the Second Edition, 1d.

## E R R A T A.

N. B. (b) signifies from the bottom of the page.

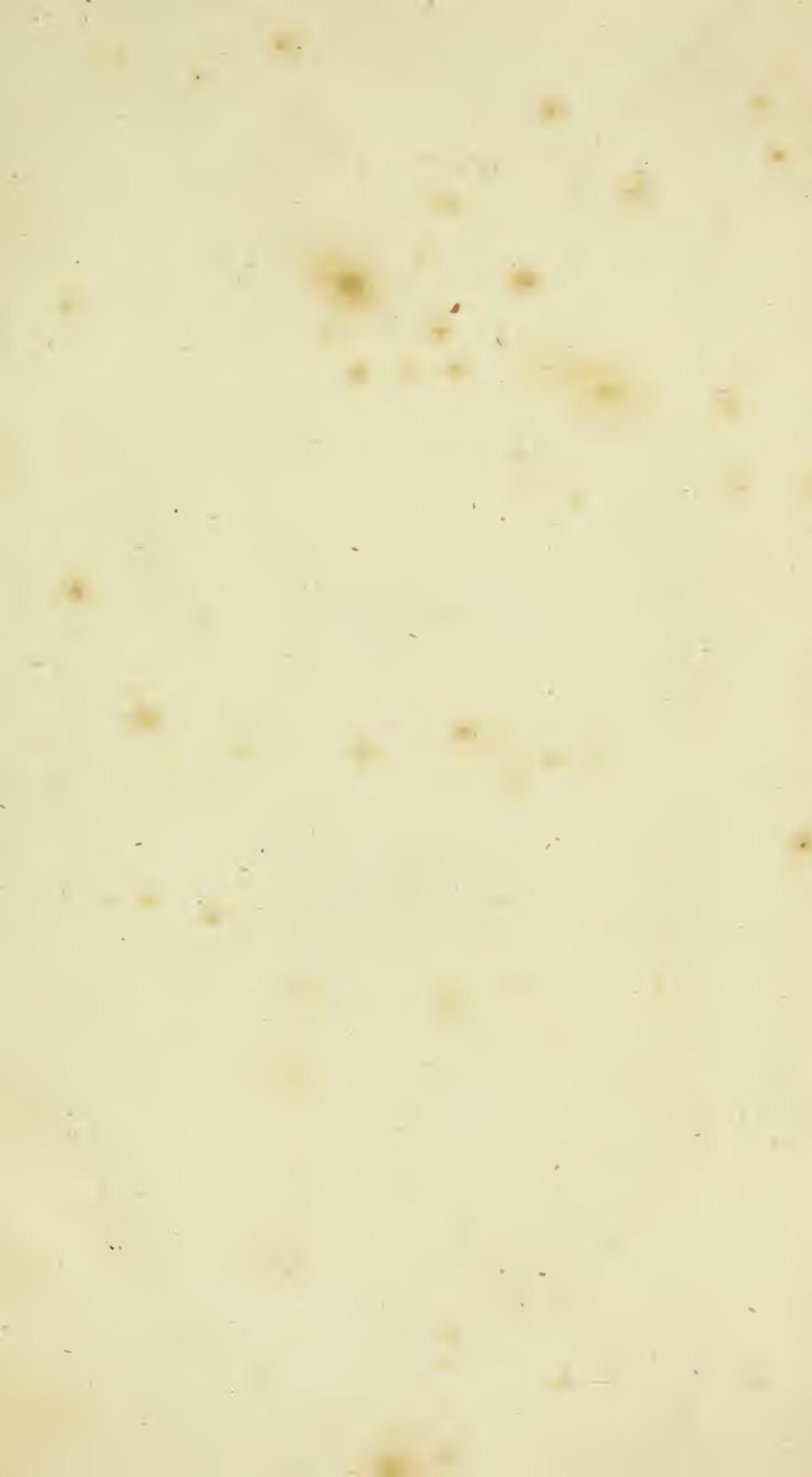
Pref. p. 9. *dele* not. P. 6, l. 5, *for* refinements *read* refinement. p. 19, l. 3, *for* the, *r.* that. p. 25, l. 16, *for* Latiaris, *r.* Latialis. p. 27, l. 8, (b) *for* rise, *r.* arise. p. 35, l. 16, *for* affects, *r.* affect. p. 60, l. 7, *dele* proper. p. 74, l. 11, *for* knowledge, *r.* a knowledge. p. 78, l. 1, (b) *for* preposition, *r.* proposition. p. 80, l. 8 (b) *for* contradicting, *r.* contradicted. p. 85, l. 6, *for* strict, *r.* strictly. p. 99, l. 12, *for* truths, *r.* truth. p. 100, l. 9 (b) *for* those by, *r.* those of. p. 106, l. 10 (b) *for* Jewish, *r.* the Jewish. p. 130, l. 1 (b) *for* their, *r.* the. p. 134, l. 11 (b) *for* sufficiently, *r.* sufficient. p. 146, l. 6, *for* insufficient, *r.* in sufficient. p. 160, l. 7, *for* translations, *r.* transactions. p. 163, l. 10, *dele* to themselves. p. 197, l. 11 (b) *for* accomplishments, *r.* accomplishment. p. 210, l. 12 (b) *for* under, *r.* after. p. 212, l. 9, *for* the, *r.* his. p. 214, l. 8, *for* clear, *r.* a clear. p. 215, l. 1, *for* he; *r.* she. p. 217, l. 13, *for* from, *r.* to. p. 217, l. 5 (b) *for* cut out, *r.* cut off out. p. 219, l. 6, *for* turned, *r.* returned. p. 236, l. 13, *for* heathens, *r.* heathenism. p. 236, l. 13, *for* Mohammedans, *r.* Mohammedanism. p. 236, l. 1 (b) *for* of, *r.* for. p. 237, l. 1 (b) *for* time, *r.* time in which. p. 277, l. 13, *for* the facts, *r.* facts. p. 285, l. 4 (b) *for* these, *r.* there. p. 388, l. 4 (b) *for* ever, *r.* was ever. p. 293, l. 11, *for* have, *r.* trace.

There is a mistake relating to the date of Nahum's prophecy, p. 200, at the bottom. Read, *about the time of the Assyrian captivity, and in about seventy years after, &c.*

To the books recommended in the preface, add Gerard's *Dissertations on subjects relating to the genius and evidences of christianity.*

N. B. Directions will be given to correct a few of the more considerable of these errata with a pen.









**Boston Public Library  
Central Library, Copley Square**

**Division of  
Reference and Research Services**

**The Date Due Card in the pocket indicates the date on or before which this book should be returned to the Library.  
Please do not remove cards from this pocket.**



